

Sergeant George A. Brown, III
End of Watch: Tuesday, April 27, 2004



Sentence stays despite victory

Published on Saturday, February 17, 2007, in the St. Petersburg Times

Three of an inmate's convictions are overturned, but he's still serving a life sentence for causing a state trooper's death.

Gregory Platt won a legal battle Friday, but it won't get him out of prison.

An appellate court tossed out three of his many convictions: two aggravated batteries and one marijuana possession.

But Platt, 34, will continue serving life behind bars for the death of a Florida Highway Patrol trooper.

Platt wreaked havoc April 27, 2004.

He drove a purple Dodge Neon into Citrus County as officers chased him from Levy County. Speeds sometimes exceeded 100 mph. He struck a Citrus sheriff's car and ran away but quickly was caught, according to court records.

Here's why Platt was eluding the law: Earlier in the day, while driving in Columbia County, he raced away from a trooper who tried to stop him for a traffic violation.

Sgt. Andy Brown, 54, crashed into a tree and died during the chase.

Platt faced a murder charge in Columbia. But first he stood trial in Citrus on charges of fleeing and eluding a law officer, aggravated battery, drug possession and other crimes.

The jury returned guilty verdicts for nine of 10 charges, and Platt's overall sentence amounted to 55 years in prison.

During that trial, the prosecution mentioned the Columbia County chase and the death of the trooper many times.

The 5th District Court of Appeal said that evidence was unwarranted because the state never proved that Platt knew about the death until after his arrest in Citrus. In fact, the evidence strongly suggested that Platt learned the news long after he left Columbia.

The appellate court upheld most of Platt's convictions in Citrus, saying proof was so overwhelming that the "erroneous admission of this evidence" was harmless.

But it wasn't harmless for the three charges for which there was conflicting evidence, the court ruled.

It's possible that marijuana found in the vehicle belonged to Platt's girlfriend.

Also, the girlfriend testified that the car's shifter broke, making it impossible for Platt to have shifted into reverse and hit the patrol car. The deputies in that car strongly disputed that notion.

In October, a Columbia County jury found Platt guilty of second-degree murder and other charges. He's serving life in prison.

Judge C. Alan Lawson wrote the opinion for the appellate court, with Judges Jacqueline Griffin and Richard Orfinger concurring.

Naples man gets life for killing FHP officer
Published on Thursday, November 2, 2006, in the Gainesville Sun

Prosecutors and troopers asked a Columbia County judge on Wednesday to show no leniency to Gregory Platt, the man convicted of murdering Florida Highway Patrol Sgt. Andy Brown.

They got their wish.

Third Judicial Circuit Judge Paul Bryan sentenced Platt, 33, of Naples, to life in prison for second-degree murder and 15 years for each conviction of fleeing from an officer in a high-speed pursuit and leaving the scene of an accident involving death.

Assistant State Attorney Todd Hingson said that Platt's crime "justified the maximum sentence allowable under the law."

Hingson said that Brown's 15-year-old son has been "devastated" by the loss of his father, which came just six months after losing his mother to cancer.

Major Rick Carpenter, commander of Troop B, said that while the sentence can't bring Brown back, it does give comfort to troopers and Brown's family to know that Platt will never harm anyone again.

"It was a devastating loss and it should've been prevented," Carpenter said. "The memories of his death will never go away."

Carpenter told The Sun that Brown, 54, was a former Marine and was well-liked in Lake City where he was actively involved in the community. As a veteran of more than 30 years with the FHP, Brown "lived by the oath and represented law enforcement and the FHP in a very professional manner," Carpenter said.

Defense attorney Herbert Ellis said Wednesday that he was "hoping for better" for his client's sentence and will appeal the judge's ruling.

A jury found Platt guilty of Brown's murder last month. On April 27, 2004, Platt led Brown on a 100-mph chase after the trooper had pulled Platt over for speeding. During the chase, witnesses said, Platt pulled on his emergency brake, causing the trooper to crash his patrol car into a tree on Sisters Welcome Road near Lake City.

Platt sentenced to life plus 30

Published on Wednesday, November 1, 2006, in the Lake City Reporter

Gregory Hampton Platt, who was convicted last month of the second-degree murder of a Florida Highway Patrol trooper in 2004, was sentenced to life in prison Wednesday morning in Lake City.

Platt was convicted on Oct. 5 of the second-degree murder of FHP Sgt. George "Andy" Brown III after a four-day trial at the Columbia County Courthouse.

He was also convicted of fleeing a police officer in high speed pursuit, leaving the scene of an accident resulting in a death and driving with a suspended or revoked license.

Brown was killed during a high-speed chase while pursuing Platt through Columbia County in April, 2004. After Brown crashed, Platt fled the scene and was later caught in Citrus County. At the time of his death, Brown was the 38th trooper killed in the line of duty in the state of Florida.

Platt received his sentence Wednesday morning from Third Judicial Circuit Court Judge Paul Bryan after he heard from the prosecution and Platt's defense.

Platt received the maximum sentence on all four counts. In addition to life in prison on the count of second-degree murder, Platt also received 15 years each on the charges of fleeing a police officer in a high speed pursuit and leaving the scene of an accident resulting in a death.

He received 60 days in jail on the charge of driving with a suspended or revoked license, but received credit for time already spent in jail.

The other sentences will run consecutively. Platt is already serving a 55-year prison sentence from charges in Citrus County, where he was captured after Brown's death.

“We're pleased that he was sentenced to the maximum punishment allowable by law,” said Assistant State Attorney Todd Hingson, lead prosecutor in the case. “We feel that his criminal history, his actions resulting in Trooper Brown's death and the impact of his death on his family, the FHP and our community warranted the maximum sentence.”

Platt's attorney, Herb Ellis with the Public Defender's Office, said they will appeal the sentence within the next 30 days.

“We respect the hard work the jury did and I know that they paid close attention to everything, but some of the rulings about what they would hear about (Platt's) prior record was pre-dooming us as a result of the trial.”

The appeal will go to the First District Court of Appeals in Tallahassee. Ellis said it could be about a year before the appeal goes to court.

The prosecution had previously sought an enhanced sentence because of Platt's extensive criminal history, but abandoned that request before the sentencing took place.

At the beginning of the sentencing Wednesday, Ellis put in a motion for a retrial, which Bryan denied.

The sentencing hearing saw several friends of Brown's speak about his life and career with the Florida Highway Patrol.

Maj. Rick Carpenter, commander of Troop B of the Florida Highway Patrol, said law enforcement training prepares troopers for a lot of things, but “nothing prepares us for seeing one of our own killed.”

Col. Chris Knight, director of the Florida Highway Patrol, said the agency lost one of its best troopers because of an intentional act on the part of Platt.

“He did his job well,” Knight said of Brown. “He was known throughout the state as a hard worker.”

A letter written by Brown's mother, Elizabeth Anderson, who was not present at the sentencing, was given to Platt to read before it was filed.

The letter was not read aloud.

Before Platt received his sentence, Hingson asked Bryan to consider Platt's criminal history, as well as the impact of Brown's death on his family, the Florida Highway Patrol and the community.

Hingson also said Brown's son, who was 13 at the time of his father's death, had previously lost his mother just six months prior to Brown's death.

“(Brown) was not just a victim, he was a person,” Hingson said. “He was someone's father. He was someone's son. He was someone's fiancée.”

Ellis said Platt and his defense believed Brown performed his job honorably and they respect his service and his memory, but Ellis stood by statements made by a crash reconstruction expert during the trial who said the crash could not have happened the way law enforcement officials said it happened.

He claimed the wreck was an accident.

Before Bryan handed down his sentence, he told Platt that his actions had taken a life that cannot be replaced.

"If any sentence would bring him back to life, I would do it," Bryan said.

Driver sentenced to life in prison in death of FHP trooper
Published on Wednesday, November 1, 2006, in the Bradenton Herald

LAKE CITY, Fla. - A driver convicted of second-degree murder for causing a crash that killed the Florida Highway Patrol trooper chasing him received the maximum sentence Wednesday of life in prison.

Gregory Hampton Platt had taken a life that cannot be replaced, said Third Judicial Circuit Court Judge Paul Bryan.

"If any sentence would bring him back to life, I would do it," Bryan said.

Platt was also sentenced to 15 years in prison for fleeing a police officer in a high speed pursuit and an additional 15 years in prison for leaving the scene of an accident resulting in a death. He also received 60 days in jail on a charge of driving with a suspended or revoked license, but received credit for time already spent in jail.

He is already serving 55 years in prison from additional charges in Citrus County, where he was captured following the April 2004 wreck that killed Sgt. George "Andy" Brown III.

"We're pleased that he was sentenced to the maximum punishment allowable by law," said Assistant State Attorney Todd Hingson. "We feel that his criminal history, his actions resulting in Trooper Brown's death and the impact of his death on his family, the FHP and our community warranted the maximum sentence."

Platt's public defender, Herb Ellis, said an appeal would be filed within 30 days. Bryan denied a motion for retrial that Ellis filed before the sentencing hearing.

"We respect the hard work the jury did and I know that they paid close attention to everything, but some of the rulings about what they would hear about his prior record was pre-dooming us as a result of the trial," Ellis said.

A jury last month convicted Platt after a four-day trial.

Brown, 54, was going about 80 mph while chasing Platt's Dodge Neon. Platt suddenly pressed his brakes and Brown lost control of his cruiser and hit an oak tree, a preliminary crash report said.

Brown was the first FHP trooper to die in the line of duty since 1998, and the 38th trooper to die in Florida since the FHP started keeping records in 1941.

Man found guilty in trooper's death

Published on Friday, October 6, 2006, in the Gainesville Sun

LAKE CITY - A Columbia County jury found a 33-year-old man guilty Thursday of second-degree murder in connection to the 2004 death of Florida Highway Patrol Sgt. Andy Brown.

Troopers said Gregory Platt of Naples led Brown, 54, a FHP veteran of more than 30 years, on a 100-mph chase on April 27, 2004.

During the chase, witnesses said, Platt pulled on his emergency brake, causing the trooper to crash his patrol car into a tree on Sisters Welcome Road near Lake City.

Platt also was convicted Thursday of fleeing an officer in a high-speed pursuit, leaving the scene of an accident resulting in death and driving with a suspended license.

Although Platt's defense hinged on calling the wreck an accident, jurors, who deliberated for four hours, disagreed.

"This was justice for Trooper Brown, for his family and for the FHP," Assistant State Attorney Todd Hingson said after the verdict was announced. "Trooper Brown was a hero; as a law enforcement officer, he worked to protect the citizens of our county and he died doing that work."

Platt's attorney, Chief Assistant Public Defender Herbert Ellis, said he was disappointed by the verdict, but that he has "no criticism of the jury's hard work."

A sentencing hearing is scheduled for Nov. 2. Ellis said that he will file an appeal of the verdict after his client's sentencing.

During closing arguments, Ellis told the jury that Brown's death was an accident and that the state's evidence did not "measure up" to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that Platt intentionally caused the trooper's death.

The evidence, however, proved Platt's guilt, Assistant State Attorney Todd Hingson countered. The prosecution's strongest evidence was an accident reconstruction test. Using Platt's car to recreate the accident, investigators found that when the emergency brake was pulled, the same tire tread marks that matched those left behind at the accident scene were also left behind after the test run, Hingson said.

Brown had pulled Platt over for speeding and Platt sped off and led the trooper on the high-speed pursuit, Hingson said.

Platt, who was wanted at the time for crimes in Citrus County and has a lengthy criminal history, had plenty of reasons to run from the law, Hingson said.

"He told the troopers (after his arrest), 'I'm not going back to prison. They'll have to kill me first,' " Hingson said in his closing argument.

Platt, who is already serving a 55-year prison term for crimes committed in Citrus County on the day Brown died, faces a life sentence plus 30 years, Hingson said.

For the troopers who worked with Brown, there is now a sense of closure with Platt's conviction, said FHP Major Rick Carpenter, commander of Troop B.

"It's hard any time that a colleague you work with is killed in line of duty," Carpenter told The Sun. "We're a close family. Andy was doing what he loved when he lost his life."

**Man convicted of 2nd degree murder in crash that killed trooper
Published on Friday, October 6, 2006, in the Gainesville Sun**

A jury convicted a driver of second-degree murder Thursday because he slammed on his brakes during a high speed car chase causing the crash that killed the Florida Highway Patrol trooper who was chasing him.

Gregory Hampton Platt was also found guilty of fleeing a police officer in high speed pursuit, leaving the scene of an accident resulting in a death and driving with a suspended or revoked license, the Lake City Reporter reported for Friday's editions.

Sgt. George "Andy" Brown III, 54, was going about 80 mph while chasing Platt's Dodge Neon in April 2004. Platt suddenly pressed his brakes and Brown lost control of his cruiser and hit an oak tree, a preliminary crash report said.

Brown was the first FHP trooper to die in the line of duty since 1998, and the 38th trooper to die in Florida since the FHP started keeping records in 1941.

"We're very pleased," said lead prosecutor and assistant state attorney Todd Hingson. "Trooper Brown was a hero. He put his life on the line every day for the citizens of Columbia County and today was about justice for him, his family and for the Florida Highway Patrol."

Platt is scheduled to be sentenced on Nov. 1. Hingson said the state will request the maximum sentence of life plus 30 years in prison. Platt has already been sentenced to 55 years in prison from additional charges in Citrus County where he was captured following the wreck that killed Brown.

"I respect the job that the jury did," Platt's attorney Herb Ellis said. "We are very disappointed in the verdict and Mr. Platt has already requested an appeal after the sentence is imposed."

**Jury finds Platt guilty on all counts
Published on Thursday, October 5, 2006, in the Lake City Reporter**

Gregory Hampton Platt was found guilty of second-degree murder of Florida Highway Patrol Sgt. George "Andy" Brown III late Thursday night.

Platt had been on trial this week in Columbia County for Brown's death, which occurred in April 2004 while Brown was chasing a fleeing Platt in a high-speed chase. Platt was charged and found guilty of second-degree murder, fleeing a police officer in high speed pursuit, leaving the scene of an accident resulting in a death and driving with a suspended or revoked license.

"We're very pleased," said lead prosecutor and assistant state attorney Todd Hingson. "Trooper Brown was a hero. He put his life on the line every day for the citizens of Columbia County and today was about justice for him, his family and for the Florida Highway Patrol."

Thursday, the fourth day of Platt's trial, saw his defense, led by Herb Ellis with the Public Defender's Office, showed videos to the court of Sisters Welcome Road, where the crash occurred.

The defense also presented an accident reconstruction expert, who claimed it was nearly impossible for the wreck to have occurred in the way it did because of the close proximity of the vehicles in the high-speed chase.

Each side gave its closing argument and the case went to the jury shortly before 5 p.m. Thursday.

After approximately four hours of deliberation, the jury returned its guilty verdict.

Platt is scheduled to be sentenced on Nov. 1. Hingson said the state will be asking for the maximum sentence available, which would be life plus 30 years in prison. Platt has already been sentenced to 55 years in prison from additional charges in Citrus County where he was captured following the wreck that killed Brown.

"I respect the job that the jury did," Ellis said. "We are very disappointed in the verdict and Mr. Platt has already requested an appeal after the sentence is imposed."

Woman testifies in Platt trial

Published on Thursday, October 5, 2006, in the Lake City Reporter

The trial of Gregory Hampton Platt continued Tuesday with the questioning of Kelly Jean Smith, who was traveling in the car with Platt through Columbia County at the time of the death of a Florida Highway Patrol sergeant.

Platt, 33, is on trial for the death of FHP Sgt. George "Andy" Brown which occurred in April 2004. According to the investigation, Brown was trailing Platt at high speeds in Columbia County when Brown crashed his car and died.

Platt is facing charges of second-degree murder, fleeing a police officer in a high speed pursuit, leaving the scene of an accident resulting in death and driving with a suspended or revoked license.

The trial began Monday with the prosecution presenting 17 witnesses in the case, as well as many eyewitnesses to Platt's actions before and after the crash.

A video taken from a patrol car was played for the jury Tuesday after Platt and Smith were arrested in Citrus County in 2004. In the video, it shows the two talking quietly in the back of the patrol car.

Smith took the stand Tuesday and told the prosecution that, after she and Platt were arrested, they initially developed a plan to say someone else was driving the vehicle when the wreck occurred in Columbia County.

Smith later changed her statement to law enforcement officials and stated both she and Platt were in Columbia County at the time of the wreck and traveling in the car in question.

When cross-examined by Herb Ellis, Platt's attorney with the Public Defender's office, Smith said she did not remember Platt applying the emergency brake in their car, which law enforcement officials claim possibly led to Brown's death.

Smith also said she didn't see the crash when it occurred and didn't remember seeing any bystanders after the crash.

Platt has already been convicted in Citrus County of several charges after law enforcement arrested him there after the wreck. Platt was charged with two counts of aggravated assault among other charges and was sentenced to 55 years in prison.

The prosecution has now called 22 witnesses and is expected to finish its case late Wednesday or early Thursday. Tuesday also saw witnesses from the pursuit in Citrus County.

Assistant State Attorney Todd Hingson is prosecuting the case against Platt.

Third Judicial Circuit Court Judge Paul Bryan is presiding over the trial.

Prosecution rests case in Platt trial

Published on Wednesday, October 4, 2006, in the Lake City Reporter

The state rested its case Wednesday afternoon in the trial of Gregory Hampton Platt, who is believed to be responsible for the death of a Florida Highway Patrol trooper in 2004.

The case could go to the jury as early as today.

After the state rested its case, Herb Ellis, with the public defender's office and Platt's attorney, asked Third Judicial Circuit Court Judge Paul Bryan for a judgment of acquittal on three of Platt's four charges.

Platt faces charges of second-degree murder, fleeing a police officer in a high speed pursuit, leaving the scene of an accident resulting in a death and driving with a suspended or revoked license. These charges stem from an April 2004 crash that took the life of FHP Sgt. George "Andy" Brown.

Ellis asked Bryan to consider reducing the charge of second-degree murder to a charge of aggravated manslaughter and presented evidence to Bryan showing other similar cases where the charges were reduced.

Bryan said he would take the request to reduce the second-degree murder charge into consideration and make his ruling this morning.

He refused to reduce or drop the other charges.

If it chooses to do so, the defense would put on its case today. If not, each side will present its closing argument and the case will go to the jury.

The state continued to present testimony on Wednesday, including the testimony of traffic homicide investigators who worked the crash. They testified that the physical evidence at the scene of the crash where Brown died showed that Platt applied an emergency brake at speeds in excess of 100 mph, which caused Brown to take evasive action, leading to the crash that caused his death.

Assistant State Attorney Todd Hingson, lead prosecutor in the case, said this is evidence that Platt showed ill-will toward Brown, as well as his celebratory actions following the crash.

Ellis refuted the argument and stated no ill-will, hatred or spite toward Brown, and the crash that killed Brown was an accident that Platt was not aware of until after he was arrested.

Man Accused of Killing FHP Sergeant Back in Court Published on Tuesday, October 3, 2006, in the First Coast News

LAKE CITY, FL -- The man accused of leading a Florida Highway Patrol sergeant on a fatal high-speed chase made his second appearance in court Tuesday.

Gregory Platt is charged with second degree murder for the death of FHP Sergeant Andy Brown.

The state attorney's office says Platt hit the emergency break on his car while going more than 100 miles per hour.

That caused Sgt. Brown to slam on his brakes, swerve off the road and slam into a tree in Lake City in 2004.

Brown died shortly after the crash from his injuries.

The jury heard opening statements in the case Tuesday, and the state is expected to continue presenting its case with a number of witnesses Wednesday.

**Ex-Girlfriend Testifies Against Man Charged In Trooper's Death
Published on Tuesday, October 3, 2006, on WJXT News**

LAKE CITY, Fla. -- A Columbia County jury heard more testimony on Tuesday in the trial of a man charged with murder in the death of a state trooper more than two years ago.

Florida Highway Patrol Sgt. Andy Brown was killed in April of 2004.

Investigators said he was pursuing a car when the driver slammed on the brakes, causing Brown to lose control of his cruiser. Brown went off the road and hit a tree.

According to investigators, Gregory Platt of Naples was driving the car that Brown was following.

Platt is charged with second-degree murder because of the felony murder law.

Platt was apprehended in Citrus County after a second pursuit ended with a crash involving a civilian's vehicle and an officer's car.

On Monday, the prosecution presented 17 witnesses in hopes of proving Platt guilty of second-degree murder.

Platt's former girlfriend, Kelly Smith, who investigators said was in the car with Platt at the time of the incident, took the stand on Tuesday.

Smith told the jury Platt was running from police because he was free on bail and had missed his court date.

She also told the jury she did not see Brown go off the road, but that Platt saw the accident and told her the trooper would be OK. She said he had no intent on stopping.

"(He said) that he wasn't going to, and they'd have to kill him first," Smith said.

After hearing from Smith, the jury watched a two-hour video of Smith and Platt taken as they sat in the back of a Citrus County squad car.

The video was difficult to understand, showing images of Platt screaming in the back of the squad car. Channel 4's John Dunlap reported it was unclear what the jury was expected to learn from the video.

The prosecution is expected to rest some time on Wednesday, with the defense beginning its case soon after. The case is expected to be in the hands of the jury by the end of the week.

If Platt is convicted of all charges, he could be sentenced to life in prison.

Man's trial in FHP trooper's death begins

Published on Tuesday, October 3, 2006, in the Gainesville Sun

CROSS CITY - On Monday morning, a Columbia County jury began hearing the story of how Florida Highway Patrol Trooper George Andrew Brown III died in April 2004 when his Camaro crashed into a tree.

Gregory Hampton Platt, a man already serving a 55-year prison term for crimes committed in Citrus County on the day Brown died, faces a life sentence if convicted in the trooper's death.

In his opening statement, Assistant State Attorney Todd Hingson told jurors that on the morning of April 27, 2004, Brown "did what he had done for 30 years - he climbed in behind the wheel of his patrol car."

Brown's body had to be removed from the 2002 Camaro after a collision with a tree so violent that the state-issued car was nearly split in two.

Platt is accused of leading Brown on a 100 mph chase that led to the fatal crash alongside Sisters Welcome Road near Lake City. Platt is charged with second-degree murder, fleeing an officer in a high-speed pursuit, leaving the scene of an accident resulting in death and driving with a suspended or revoked license.

Chief Assistant Public Defender Herbert Ellis countered by telling jurors that FHP made a presumption in the case, "a rush to judgment that someone murdered" Brown and he said "FHP acted emotionally." Ellis told jurors that they would need to determine "what is an emotional opinion and what is reality."

Hingson said jurors could expect to hear from witnesses that Brown saw Platt speeding, pulled Platt over and was walking up to the driver's side window of Platt's car when Platt suddenly sped off. Hingson said Brown ran back to his car and was right behind Platt's car when Platt pulled on his emergency brake, forcing Brown to steer hard to the left to avoid rear-ending Platt's car. Brown apparently lost control of the Camaro and collided with the tree.

In 1991 Platt began serving a seven-year prison sentence for multiple crimes in Lee and Collier counties, including aggravated battery with a deadly weapon, robbery with a gun or deadly weapon and kidnapping in the commission of a felony.

Citrus County officials said it was just over a year ago - on Sept. 26, 2005 - that Platt was sentenced to a total of 55 years in prison for crimes committed in Citrus County on the day of Brown's death: two counts of aggravated battery, fleeing and attempting to elude, possession of cocaine and possession of marijuana.

Man's Trial In Trooper's Death Begins Today

Published on Monday, October 2, 2006, on WJXT News

LAKE CITY, Fla. -- A man accused of causing a crash that killed a veteran state trooper in 2004 is scheduled to go on trial in Columbia County on Monday.

Gregory Platt of Naples is charged with second-degree murder in the death of Floriday Highway Patrol Sgt. George "Andy" Brown III.

Prosecutors said Brown was pursuing Platt's car about six miles south of Lake City when Platt slammed on the brakes, causing Brown to lose control of his cruiser. Brown's car left the road and hit several trees.

Hours after the crash, police stopped a Naples couple -- Platt, 31, and Kelly Jean Smith, 25 -- in south Citrus County after a two-county chase at speeds over 100 mph.

Police said Platt tried to run, but he was quickly arrested. Smith was arrested in the car.

Authorities said they were able to locate Platt's car because Brown had radioed in a complete description before he crashed.

Brown, 54, a trooper since July 1970, had followed in his father's footsteps. Brown doubled as a "Bear in the Air," the nickname given to troopers who also pilot FHP spotter aircraft.

He retired in 1996 after a career that saw assignments in southeast and in northeast Florida, but returned to the force after a year off and was stationed in Lake City.

"He truly had the safety of the public at heart," Burroughs said. "He truly believed in enforcing traffic laws."

Platt trial begins Monday

Published on Friday, September 29, 2006, in the Lake City Reporter

The man law enforcement officials believe is responsible for the death of a Florida Highway Patrol trooper in 2004 in Lake City returns to Columbia County next week to face charges of second-degree murder.

Gregory Hampton Platt, 33, is being tried for the high-speed chase that led to the death of FHP Sgt. George "Andy" Brown in Columbia County in April 2004.

Platt is facing four different charges, including second-degree murder, fleeing a police officer in a high-speed pursuit, leaving the scene of an accident resulting in death and driving with a suspended or revoked license, said Assistant State Attorney Todd Hingson.

Hingson said Platt could receive up to life in prison for the second-degree murder charge and up to 15 years each on the second and third count, both of which are second-degree felonies.

Driving with a suspended or revoked license is a misdemeanor. The maximum sentence on that charge is 60 days in jail.

The jury for the case was selected earlier this week and Platt's trial begins Monday and will play out throughout the week. The court file reflects a notice of intent to seek an enhanced sentence because Platt is listed as a three-time violent felony offender.

Platt has already faced charges in Citrus County, where he was convicted and sentenced to prison time.

After the death of Brown, Platt led officers on a high-speed chase through Citrus County where he was eventually caught.

Platt was convicted in Citrus County last year on charges of felony fleeing and eluding, two counts of aggravated assault, one count of possession of cocaine and one count of possession of more than 20 grams of marijuana.

He was sentenced to 55 years in jail for those charges.

Retired law enforcement to honor fallen officers

Published on Sunday, May 14, 2006, in the Citrus County Chronicle

In honor of National Police Week, the local chapter of the National Association of Retired Law Enforcement Officers (NARLEO) will commemorate National Peace Officers Memorial Day with a motorcade followed by a wreath-laying service.

“This (day) was a special event started 40 years ago by President John Kennedy to honor all peace officers killed in the line of duty,” said Andrew J. Tarpey, NARLEO’s chairman. National Police Week begins today.

The motorcade will begin at the Old Courthouse in downtown Inverness and will consist of one or two cars from several local police agencies — including the Crystal River Police Department, Citrus County Sheriff’s Office, the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and the Florida Highway Patrol — and a hearse carrying a commemorative wreath to be placed at Cooter Pond Park, which is adjacent to the Citrus County Sheriff’s Office. It is scheduled to begin about 10 a.m. Monday.

In past years, the service honored specific law enforcement officers killed in the line of duty, including Sgt. George “Andy” Brown, a Florida highway patrolman from Lake City who died in an accident in 2004 while pursuing a suspect, as well as relatives of local residents who were killed during the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center.

Tarpey said the county is fortunate there is no one in particular to honor this year, because at this point no member of any local law enforcement agency has been killed in the line of duty.

“People don’t realize how lucky we are down here,” said Tarpey, a former Port Authority Police officer. “(The Port Authority) lost 36 members on 9/11.”

State Sen. Nancy Argenziano, R-Dunnellon, and U.S. Rep. Ginny Brown-Waite, R-Crystal River, have been invited to speak at the service, while Inverness Mayor Bob Plaisted and City Manager Frank DiGiovanni have planned to attend and say a few words. Tarpey said he hoped there would be a large turnout at the service, which is open to the general public.

"These guys are laying their lives on the line every day, and it's important to honor the individuals who gave the ultimate sacrifice," said Tarpey. "After 9/11, there's a newfound appreciation for public safety officers, and I hope this stays that way."

Fallen heroes service planned for Thursday
Published on Sunday, May 7, 2006, in the Lake City Reporter

Columbia County will honor its law enforcement officers who have given their lives in the line of duty for the safety and well-being of the county's citizens.

The fourth annual Fallen Heroes memorial service will take place Thursday at the law enforcement monument on Lake DeSoto. The event will begin at 6:30 p.m.

"This is a memorial committee made up of several state and local agencies," said Capt. Roy Brown of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.

Brown, one of the organizers for this year's event, said the chairperson is rotated from a different agency this year. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission is organizing this year's event.

Brown said the event is designed to honor local officers located in North Central Florida that have been killed in the line of duty.

"We want to honor them and their loved ones during this time and we personally invite those folks to come out," he said. "We go through a memorial service to honor them and recognize their families one by one and we read the name of the officer, as well as have an officer from that agency escort the family to the memorial itself."

While the list of those honored will most certainly include officers killed recently, such as Columbia County Sheriff's Dep. Jeff Davis and Florida Highway Patrol Trooper Andy Brown, it will also honor some much older officers.

"William T. Stranger was a Lake City marshal and was killed Nov. 17, 1900," Brown said. "I don't know if any of his descendants will show up. We all like to think we'll be remembered many years after we're gone, but the truth is, about one generation after their death, these folks are forgotten. We need to make sure that their memory doesn't die and continue to bring to the forefront the fact that they paid the ultimate sacrifice in support of their community."

Rev. Robert Davis, father of Dep. Jeff Davis, will be in attendance at Thursday's event.

"I think it's very commendable that our law enforcement agencies have a service of this nature," he said.

"I think it lets people know that our men and women who serve in law enforcement have not been forgotten for their service to the community."

Davis said the memorial services have been helpful to his family who have had to deal with the grief of losing a loved one.

"It makes us feel that his service to law enforcement was not taken for granted and appreciated," he said.

Peddling toward relief for families of fallen officers
Published on Thursday, December 8, 2005, in the Miami Herald

Dozens of police officers from around the state took off Monday for the five-day Tour de Force bicycle ride to raise funds for the families of fallen officers.

North Miami Beach police chief Linda Loizzo said the gifts go to help children left motherless or fatherless. So far this year, the tour has raised \$10,000 for the families of six officers who died in the line of duty.

Money came from T-shirt sales, corporate sponsorships, a series of \$10-a-plate luncheons at Outback Steakhouse, and a raffle on Monday that raised \$3,000.

"As a survivor myself, the wife of a slain officer, I can tell you this means a lot to the families," Loizzo said. In 1980, her husband Carl Mertes was shot while chasing a car thief in North Miami, leaving her with three small children.

The tour started in 1997, with the help of North Miami Beach Det. Mike DeMarcus, to help the family of Florida Highway Patrol Trooper Robert Smith, a father of 4-year-old twins who was killed on Interstate 95 in Broward when a drunk driver rear-ended his cruiser. Since then the tour has raised more than \$75,000.

As the riders headed out from North Miami Beach, dignitaries read letter of appreciation from survivors and the "honor roll" of those who died this year in Florida. They included Fort Lauderdale patrolman Jos[◆] D[◆]az, who died in a fall Oct. 8.

One letter of appreciation came from a couple who adopted Tucker, the son of Andy Brown, a Florida Highway Patrol sergeant killed in a car accident while chasing a suspect in Columbia County last year. The family received \$2,000, which they said they'll put aside for Tucker's college fund.

"He's got a lot of sadness, but we can't help but think that these acts of kindness along the way have lifted his spirits," the letter states.

Three officers were killed by gunfire, one by vehicular assault and one suffered a work-related illness.

Riders will pedal 54 miles a day through 42 police jurisdictions to reach Daytona Beach Shores on Friday.

To donate, call North Miami Beach police at 305-949-5500 and ask for Yvette Darden. For more information on officers killed in the line of duty, see the Officer Down Memorial Page at <http://www.odmp.org/>.

Man who fled deadly crash gets 55 years

Published on Tuesday, September 27, 2005, in the Citrus County Chronicle

Comparing a Naples man's extensive criminal past to a "train wreck," a Citrus County judge sentenced Gregory Hampton Platt to the maximum 55 years in prison Monday for fleeing from a crash that killed a Florida Highway Patrol trooper last year.

Circuit Judge Ric Howard told Platt, 32, he wasn't going to give him any "charities" in the case that would reduce his sentence. The judge ordered that he serve consecutive sentences on the nine charges a jury convicted him on last August in connection to the April 27, 2004, chase that killed Sgt. George "Andy" Brown, 54, and ended in Platt's own crash after the chase entered the Citrus County.

Pointing to a criminal history that began when he was 19, Howard told Platt it was sad that the "train wreck" that began when he was in his late teens "will essentially end your life."

Brown was killed after he tried pursuing Platt, who had fled when the trooper attempted to pull him over near Lake City, in Columbia County. Brown was killed when the Camaro patrol car he was driving went off the road at estimated speeds of more than 100 mph and spun into a grove of trees.

Platt was arrested later in the afternoon after crashing his Dodge Neon into traffic in Crystal River.

Howard referred to the facts in the case before sentencing Platt, as well as his past, which Assistant State Attorney Rich Buxman said included convictions on armed robbery and kidnapping.

"He has probably the most egregious criminal record, in terms of serious criminal charges, that I have ever seen," Buxman said.

Howard asked Platt about his troubled past. Platt talked of his father being murdered by a cousin, and his mother in prison for killing a friend's father. He had previously maintained a drug addiction was to blame for his crimes.

When asked if he had anything to say before being sentenced, Platt shook his head and said a quiet, "no."

He still faces a charge of second-degree murder in Columbia County for Brown's death, and faces life in prison. Two men who will likely be there are FHP Sgt. Daniel Roddenberry and Lt. Frank Troffo.

The two sat quietly in court listening to the sentence, showing support for Brown's family.

Roddenberry said it was a sad chapter when Brown died, and that Platt "has several chapters to go."

"Nothing we can do can bring back Sgt. Brown and take away the loss of such a fine officer," he said. "He was such a fine example of what a man should be. He was an excellent human being."

Naples man in car chase gets 55 years

Published on Tuesday, September 27, 2005, in the St. Petersburg Times

INVERNESS - Gregory Hampton Platt, a Naples man who led law officers on a high-speed car chase that ended in Citrus County, was sentenced Monday to serve 55 years in prison.

In August, a jury found Platt, 32, guilty of two counts of aggravated battery. He was also convicted of eluding arrest, resisting a law enforcement officer, driving with a suspended license, leaving the scene of an accident and possessing cocaine, marijuana and drug paraphernalia. He was acquitted of battery.

Circuit Judge Ric Howard said Monday afternoon that Platt deserved the maximum sentence - 55 years behind bars - for those crimes, based on Platt's "voluminous" list of prior offenses, which included attempted armed robbery, kidnapping and aggravated battery.

"He has probably the most egregious prior record in terms of violent crimes I've ever seen," Assistant State Attorney Richard Buxman told the judge.

Platt's defense attorney, Robert Christensen, asked Howard for a more lenient sentence.

"He made bad decisions based on irrational thoughts that were derived out of a drug-induced state," Christensen said.

Platt also faces a second-degree murder charge in Columbia County in connection with the death of Florida Highway Patrol Sgt. George A. "Andy" Brown III. A court date has not been scheduled in that case.

Law enforcement officials say Platt led Brown, 54, on a chase through Columbia County after Brown tried to stop him for speeding near Lake City on April 27, 2004. During the chase, Brown's patrol car went off the road and hit a tree, killing Brown.

Later that day, a trooper in Levy County spotted Platt's purple Dodge Neon near Inglis and tried to stop him. The trooper followed Platt into Citrus County, where sheriff's deputies joined the chase.

The pursuit ended after Platt crashed into a car waiting at a stoplight at State Road 44 and County Road 486. Platt then backed into a sheriff's patrol car, deputies and witnesses said.

Driver who led chase is convicted

Published on Friday, August 26, 2005, in the St. Petersburg Times

INVERNESS - A jury found Gregory Hampton Platt guilty of nine of 10 charges in connection with a high-speed chase that ended in Citrus County.

The verdict in the two-day trial came just before 7 p.m. Wednesday after more than two hours of deliberation.

Platt, 32, of Naples was found guilty of two counts of aggravated battery. He was also convicted of eluding arrest, resisting a law enforcement officer, driving with a suspended license, possessing cocaine, marijuana and drug paraphernalia, and leaving the scene of an accident. He was acquitted of a charge of battery.

Platt faces a second-degree murder charge and others in Columbia County in connection with the death of a Florida Highway Patrol trooper.

Law enforcement officials say Platt led Sgt. George A. "Andy" Brown III, 54, on a chase through Columbia County after Brown tried to stop him for speeding near Lake City. During the chase, Brown's patrol car went off the road, hit a tree and killed him.

Later that day, a trooper in Levy County spotted Platt's vehicle and tried to stop him. The chase continued into Citrus County, where authorities apprehended him and his passenger, Kelly Smith, 25, also of Naples.

Much of the testimony in the trial came from state and local law enforcement officers involved in the April 2004 chase. The officers gave detailed explanations of the chase, which began near Inglis and ended on State Road 44 in Citrus County. Nine bailiffs stood watch Wednesday night as Platt was fingerprinted and led out of the courtroom. Platt's attorney, Robert Christensen, said he thought the extra security had to do with Platt's pending murder charge.

Platt is scheduled to be sentenced Sept. 26 by Circuit Judge Ric Howard.

One chase, but two different stories

Published on Thursday, August 25, 2005, in the St. Petersburg Times

INVERNESS - Before the jury began its deliberations Wednesday afternoon in the trial of Gregory Hampton Platt, jurors heard two versions of the same high-speed chase.

The difference between the prosecutor's version of the two-county chase and Platt's attorney's version hinged on a single point: intent.

Yes, Platt was on the run from law enforcement and didn't want to be caught, said his defense attorney, Robert Christensen. But he argued that Platt didn't intentionally back into a Citrus County sheriff's deputy's patrol car or deliberately harm anyone else on the road that day.

He was just trying to get away, the attorney said.

"(The prosecution's) brought in a whole lot of charges, throwing it up at the wall and hoping some of it sticks," he said.

Assistant State Attorney Richard Buxman disagreed.

"The evidence is clear that he knew what he was doing," Buxman said.

Platt, 32, of Naples is accused of leading law enforcement on a chase through parts of Levy and Citrus counties on April 27, 2004, after a Columbia County crash that killed Florida Highway Patrol Sgt. George A. "Andy" Brown III, 54.

Platt has pleaded not guilty to 10 charges, including aggravated battery on an officer, fleeing and eluding a law enforcement officer with lights and sirens active, driving with a suspended license and possession of cocaine and marijuana, according to court records.

The six-person jury began its deliberations at 4:25 p.m. The second day of the trial focused on more testimony by law enforcement officers, as well as physical evidence, including drugs, taken from the car. Platt's passenger also testified.

Authorities say Platt led the trooper on a chase after Brown tried to stop him for speeding in Lake City. Brown's cruiser spun off the road and hit a tree, killing Brown.

Hours later, a trooper spotted Platt's purple Dodge Neon near Inglis. The trooper turned on his sport utility vehicle's lights, but Platt didn't stop and drove across the Citrus County line.

Citrus County sheriff's deputies joined in the pursuit, which ended after Platt turned off U.S. 19 and headed east on State Road 44, crashing into a car waiting at a stoplight at the intersection of County Road 486. Platt then backed into a sheriff's patrol car, deputies and witnesses testified.

He then got out of the car and ran. Deputies shot him with Tasers and captured him.

Platt, who is facing a second-degree murder charge in Columbia County, decided not to testify at the Citrus County trial. The defense did not present any witnesses.

Kelly Jean Smith, 25, was Platt's girlfriend at the time and the only passenger in the car. Smith wore a jail-issued orange jumpsuit when she testified Wednesday morning.

Smith initially faced drug charges in connection with the chase, but the charges were dropped in exchange for her testimony against Platt. She now faces other charges in Collier County.

Smith's story on the stand contradicted much of what she'd told investigators in earlier conversations.

Smith described that morning as a road trip gone wrong. She was using marijuana and cocaine and had taken some drugs five to 10 minutes before Brown tried to pull over the car.

Previously, she had told investigators Platt pulled the emergency brake as the couple sped away, forcing Brown to swerve to avoid a collision.

But Wednesday, Smith testified Platt didn't pull the brake. She had lied to investigators about that, she said.

"They threatened me with a lot of different things," she said. She also said she was under the influence of drugs during one of her depositions.

At the time of the chase, she didn't know the trooper had wrecked, she said, which was another contradiction.

Once the couple got to Citrus County, she said, they were going "very fast and I was high on cocaine."

As to whether Platt intended to back into the deputy's car on SR 44, Smith said she believed the deputy had hit their car, not the other way around.

After they left Columbia County, they used more drugs, she said. The second chase started when they saw another law enforcement vehicle try to stop them.

When they were arrested, they were put into the same patrol car, she said. In the back of the car, Platt told her to tell authorities another man had been driving the car in Columbia County that morning.

Their conversation was recorded and used as evidence in the trial. When that story collapsed - investigators say both could describe the other man only as someone named "Josh" from Wildwood - Smith agreed to cooperate with deputies.

Prosecutors also presented evidence taken from the Neon, including glass pipes with cocaine residue, syringe caps and more than 20 grams of marijuana.

That evidence didn't prove Platt used the drugs or knew they were in the car, which was registered to Smith, Christensen said.

Prosecutors also showed a taped interview Platt gave with investigators. He admitted to the Citrus chase, though, and bragged to the investigators that his Neon went up to 110 mph.

In closing arguments, Christensen didn't dispute Platt's involvement in the chase. But he took issue with the drug charges and the charges of aggravated battery against a law enforcement officer, saying his client didn't mean to hurt anyone.

"Quite frankly, Mr. Platt was doing everything he could to get away," he said.

But Buxman told the jury Platt did hurt others in trying to outrun the law.

"I'm going to ask you to stop the defendant's running," he said.

Jury: Platt guilty on nine counts

Published on Wednesday, August 24, 2005, in the Citrus County Chronicle

A six-member jury at the Citrus County Courthouse in Inverness found Gregory Hampton Platt, 32, guilty on nine of 10 counts connected to the April 27, 2004, crash that killed FHP Sgt. George "Andy" Brown, 54, while the trooper was pursuing Platt's Dodge Neon near Lake City, in Columbia County.

Platt was convicted on multiple charges for what prosecutors said happened here when the pursuit entered Citrus County several hours later, ending when Platt crashed into a line of cars at the intersection of County Road 486 and State Road 44 in Crystal River.

The state had been seeking a life sentence on charges that included two counts of aggravated battery on a law enforcement officer with a deadly weapon, after prosecutors said Platt intentionally rammed a Citrus County sheriff's patrol car with two deputies inside who had parked behind him after he crashed. The five-women, one-man jury, however, opted for less severe charges of aggravated battery.

Platt was found not guilty on a battery charge after prosecutors said he tried hitting a man who had attempted to prevent him from fleeing the scene of the crash in Crystal River.

After the verdict was read, Assistant State Attorney Rich Buxman told Circuit Judge Ric Howard he would seek "habitual offender" status because of Platt's lengthy criminal record.

Outside court, Buxman told a reporter that past offenses, including armed robbery, were more serious than the charges Platt was facing in this case. Because of his "extensive record," Buxman added, "I'm going to ask that he gets the maximum sentence." That sentence could be more than 50 years if Howard agrees with his recommendation at a Sept. 26 sentencing date.

Reacting to the verdict after leaving the courtroom, defense attorney Robert Christensen said he was disappointed.

"You get to know a client," he said, "and you see what the future more than likely holds."

He added he would look at the possibility of appealing the verdict.

Platt could still face life in prison on second-degree murder charges in Columbia County in connection to the chase that killed Brown. A trial there is still pending.

The 6:51 p.m. verdict, almost 2 1/2 hours after deliberations began, concluded a two-day trial during which Platt's actions were broken down to determine his intent. Driving without a license and, according to evidence, having a warrant for his arrest after missing a court date for a burglary charge in Collier County, Platt found himself being chased over a barge canal and into the county by Citrus County sheriff's deputies looking for a vehicle matching the description of the one connected to Brown's crash.

What followed was a chase where speeds were said to have reached 100 mph, leading deputies down U.S. 19, onto various back roads, and ending with the collision in Crystal

River. Platt was arrested after a short foot pursuit after he reportedly left his damaged car behind with his girlfriend in the passenger seat.

In his closing arguments, Buxman told jurors the case was about a man who did "everything he could" to escape. When he crashed into a beige Toyota Camry stopped in traffic at the Crystal River intersection, Buxman said, Platt immediately put the Dodge Neon he was driving into reverse and intentionally rammed the sheriff's patrol car that had stopped behind him.

"This isn't like a stick of butter and a buttering knife," Buxman said. "This is a 1,000-pound battering ram."

Christensen said he wasn't going to "use magic" to deny the chase occurred, but that Platt's intent wasn't to hurt anybody, and that he was simply trying to avoid being caught.

"There was no plan," Christensen told jurors. "He was flying by the seat of his pants."

Deadly chase details start trial testimony

Published on Wednesday, August 24, 2005, in the St. Petersburg Times

INVERNESS - Much of the testimony on Tuesday, the first day of Gregory Hampton Platt's trial, came from state and local law officers who chased Platt after a crash in Columbia County that ended the life of a Florida Highway Patrol trooper.

Prosecutors presented testimony that Platt intended to harm law officers and recklessly disregarded people during the chase.

Platt's defense attorney argued there was no proof of such intent.

The 32-year-old Naples man has pleaded not guilty to a litany of charges in the April 27, 2004, incident, which started in northern Florida.

Prosecutors say it all began when patrol Sgt. George A. "Andy" Brown III, 54, tried to stop Platt for speeding near Lake City.

When the car didn't stop, Brown pursued it. But the trooper's car spun off the road, barreling through trees and underbrush before hitting a tree. Brown died in the crash.

Platt faces a charge of second-degree murder in Brown's death. His trial is expected to begin in Columbia County in a few months.

But first, a Citrus County jury will decide whether Platt is legally to blame in the high-speed chase that ensued after the trooper crashed. The chase ended in Citrus.

Platt has pleaded not guilty to 10 charges, including aggravated battery on an officer, fleeing and eluding a law enforcement officer with lights and sirens active, driving with a suspended license and possession of cocaine and marijuana, according to court records.

Platt, a bald man with a thick build, sat quietly Tuesday and listened to the testimony. Extra security was provided by the Citrus County Sheriff's Office because of concerns about Platt's previous behavior. While in the Citrus County jail, he was accused of aggravated battery. The charges were later dropped, according to court records.

Trooper Wade Merritt, an officer of agricultural management based in Levy County, was among those who testified. On the afternoon of April 27, law enforcement officials in Levy and Citrus counties were warned to look out for a dark-colored Dodge Neon heading south from Columbia County, he said.

Merritt was on patrol in a state forest that morning. He left the woods and drove along U.S. 19 to Inglis to look for the suspect. He noticed a purple car that matched the description. It had a temporary license tag that was flapping in the wind and plastic stretched over the back window.

He followed the car and turned on the emergency lights inside his sport utility vehicle. The Neon sped up and headed south across the narrow bridge over the Cross Florida Barge Canal, Merritt testified.

"It was looking pretty ugly," Citrus sheriff's Detective Matthew Taylor said. "(Platt) was forcing the vehicles in the southbound lane into the guardrail."

Citrus deputies soon joined the chase, which led them into Crystal River and a busy intersection at U.S. 19 and State Road 44.

Merritt, Taylor and Deputy Dan Slingerland each testified that Platt drove the Neon into a car stopped at the intersection before backing up into Taylor and Slingerland's patrol car.

Platt's attorney, Robert Christensen, hinted that during the chase, the Neon driver's actions didn't show much forethought or planning.

"Does it seem like he's desperate at this point?" he asked Slingerland.

"Yes, sir, it does," Slingerland replied.

The suspect then jumped out of the Neon, running from law officers before he was cornered.

"He kept saying, 'Shoot me, you might as well kill me,' " Merritt testified.

Sheriff's deputies shot Platt with Tasers, which subdued him. A passenger in the car, Kelly Jean Smith, 25, also of Naples, was arrested on charges of marijuana possession. The charges were dropped in exchange for her cooperation in Platt's case, according to court records.

Platt's trial is expected to continue at 8:45 a.m. today at the Citrus County Courthouse.

Deputies testify in chase trial

Published on Wednesday, August 24, 2005, in the Citrus County Chronicle

Detective Matt Taylor testified on Tuesday at the Citrus County Courthouse in Inverness about joining a high-speed chase near Inglis last year that investigators said began with the fatal crash of a Florida Highway Patrol trooper in Columbia County, describing a pursuit he said reached high speeds and forced other cars off the road.

Taylor, a Citrus County sheriff's deputy at the time of the April 24 chase, became the lead patrol car in the pursuit on U.S. 19 when it crossed over a barge canal and into the county. The chase ended, he said, when the purple Dodge Neon he was pursuing crashed into a beige car stopped in traffic at the intersection of County Road 486 and State Road 44.

Driving his Ford Crown Victoria patrol car with fellow deputy Dan Slingerland in the passenger seat, Taylor said he parked about 20 feet behind the car, getting ready to apprehend the driver.

"I looked at Slingerland; he's starting to take his seatbelt off. I look back up and I see the reverse lights come on. I said, 'wait!' " Taylor said, adding he had just enough time to brace for impact as the car rammed into his car, jamming his shoulder.

Taylor was one of several witnesses to testify for the state in the trial of Gregory Hampton Platt, 32, of Naples, who's accused of fleeing FHP Sgt. George "Andy" Brown, 54, after an attempted traffic stop near Lake City. Prosecutors said Brown, a veteran trooper and father of a teenage son, was killed while pursuing Platt's Neon when his Chevy Camaro patrol car went off a two-lane road and into a grove of trees.

Platt faces 10 charges for what prosecutors say occurred in Citrus County, including two counts of aggravated battery on a law enforcement officer with a deadly weapon.

The state is seeking a life prison sentence.

During his opening remarks, Assistant State Attorney Rich Buxman said the case is about a man "who would stop at nothing to get away." He said Platt did everything he could to escape responsibility for what happened.

Among some of the state's evidence introduced to jurors was an audiotape of Brown's final dispatches, where the trooper requests sheriff deputies to help in his pursuit. Radioing in that he was in pursuit of a Dodge Neon nearing an intersection, Brown is asked twice by an emergency dispatcher for more information.

A third dispatch is sent out, using his patrol car number.

"Two seventy-one, can you give a color of the Neon?" is met with silence, when prosecutors believe Brown went off the road, spinning sideways and crashing the driver's side into a tree.

Trial in trooper fatality case to open

Published on Friday, March 4, 2005, in the St. Petersburg Times

INVERNESS - Jury selection for the trial of Gregory Hampton Platt, the man authorities say was involved in a crash that killed a Florida Highway Patrol trooper, is set to begin Monday.

Platt, 32, of Naples was arrested April 27 after authorities say he led law officers on a high-speed chase through Columbia County that ended when he wrecked his car just east of Crystal River.

Authorities say the chase began when FHP Sgt. George A. "Andy" Brown III, 54, tried to stop a speeding car about 6 miles south of Lake City in Columbia County. When the car didn't stop, the trooper chased it and spun off the road into several trees. He was found dead in his patrol car.

Later that day, a law officer in Levy County spotted the car suspected in the chase. When he tried to stop the car, it sped up. The officer followed it into Citrus County, where it collided with two cars before stopping.

Platt faces numerous charges in both counties, including a third-degree murder charge in Columbia. That case is still pending.

Platt faces 10 Citrus charges, including aggravated battery using a deadly weapon, fleeing and eluding a law officer, resisting arrest and drug possession, according to court records.

Platt's trial is expected to last at least through Wednesday in the courtroom of Circuit Judge Ric Howard.

Separately, Platt has been charged with aggravated battery by a person detained in a prison or jail. According to court records, that charge stems from a fight in which Platt was involved on Feb. 20 at the Citrus County jail. A fellow inmate said Platt struck him.

That case is still pending.

Unhappy Holidays

Published on Wednesday, November 24, 2004, on WCJB TV20 News

But, for one local trooper, the holidays bring a painful reminder of the dangers of the job.

While a lot of people are looking forward to the holidays, Eileen Powell will try to ignore them all together. She'll be busy working and trying to keep her mind off the man she was engaged to marry and whom she served alongside in the Florida Highway Patrol.

Lieutenant Eileen Powell can hardly look at the picture of her late fiance without remembering the day he died.

"He called me Tuesday morning about 8:30 and we had a nice little conversation. I told him I was coming home that night and that was the last time I ever talked to him."

That Tuesday, seven months ago, Eileen's fiancé, Florida Highway Patrol Sgt. Andy Brown, died when his patrol car slammed into a tree during a high speed chase in Lake City. Andy died just six weeks before he and Eileen were to be married.

After the accident, Eileen built a roadside memorial at the spot where her fiancé died. She visits the memorial each day on her way to and from work. But, Monday she was shocked at what she saw when she drove by.

Eileen says, "Sunday night of this week the park bench was stolen and the flowers were all torn up and the cross with his name on it was broken in half...my heart was broken Monday morning when I found this."

She says fixing the memorial is an even bigger reminder she won't be spending the holidays with Andy.

"The highway patrol is what he loved so I'm gonna be out here this weekend working and trying to keep other families from having to go through this same situation."

Report: 12 Florida Officers Die In Line Of Duty In 2004
Published on Wednesday, December 29, 2004, in the News 4 Jax

ORLANDO, Fla. -- Twelve members of Florida law enforcement agencies died in the line of duty this year, including nine who died in traffic accidents, a study found.

Two other officers belonging to state, county and city law enforcement bodies in Florida were shot to death -- the same number as last year -- and one officer suffered a fatal heart attack, according to the study released Tuesday by The National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund and Concerns of Police Survivors.

The 12 deaths were up from seven in 2003. Nationally, 154 officers died in the line of duty in 2004, with 72 of them killed in traffic-related accidents.

The two Florida officers who were fatally shot in the line of duty were Broward sheriff's Deputy Todd Fatta, 33, who died in October, and Marion County sheriff's Deputy Brian Robert Litz, 36, killed in February.

Two northeast Florida troopers with the Florida Highway Patrol died while pursuing suspects.

Sgt. George "Andy" Brown III died April 27 after losing control of his cruiser while trying to stop another vehicle about six miles south of Lake City.

That vehicle was stopped later that day in south Citrus County after a two-county chase and the Naples couple inside was arrested.

Trooper Darryl L. Haywood, 49, of Palm Coast, died Oct. 2 after hitting a tree along Interstate 4 in Volusia County. Haywood was trying to stop a high-speed race between a Suzuki motorcycle and a Porsche when investigators believe the tread separated on a tire and Haywood lost control of the vehicle.

That motorcyclist was later stopped on I-95 in St. Johns County Jail and charged with aggravated fleeing and eluding charge police.

Lt. George Hura Jr., 56, of the Escambia County Sheriff's Office, died in May during a training exercise in the Panhandle.

A 13th officer to die in Florida this year, U.S. Secret Service agent Phillip Lebid, 30, was killed in a traffic accident in Tampa in November.

The statistics for 2004 were compiled from reports through Dec. 24.

Families have different reasons for signs
Published on Saturday, October 16, 2004, in the Lake City Reporter

Standing on the shoulder of Sisters Welcome Road, Eileen Powell looked at the bouquets of flowers, the cross and the name Sgt. Andy Brown. She remembered the "most special man on the planet."

Powell visits the site where her fiancée died five months ago. She visits the area several times a week and has set up a roadside memorial for him. Brown, who was a sergeant with the Florida Highway Patrol, died April 27 at the age of 55 after he crashed into a tree during a high-speed chase on Sisters Welcome Road.

Because Brown has no relatives in the area, Powell took it upon herself to start a memorial. He died six weeks before their wedding day.

What started out with the flowers from the funeral has grown into a large memorial that includes several artificial flower bouquets of various colors, two crosses, one solar-lighted, and a park bench.

"Whatever I run across that I think might look nice," Powell, a lieutenant with FHP, said. "I have no idea what I'm going to end up with."

Most of the flowers at the memorial are artificial but occasionally she brings real flowers and places them near the tree his car hit.

"Those are kind of personal because he died at the tree," she said.

Powell didn't seek permission before setting up the memorial on the county road and is not sure if it is allowed.

The county does have a policy to place "Drive Safely" markers at the site of wrecks on county roads upon the request from the family of the deceased. They have received four requests, but numerous unauthorized memorials also exist.

"It's a place I can go," she said. "Because he was cremated, I don't have a grave site to go to."

Along with Powell, several of his friends and colleagues come to the site throughout the week to talk or visit.

"He would listen to everybody's problems while he was alive, so I think when they have a problem they just come here and talk to him," she said.

She said having the memorial and having to drive by it every day to work probably makes it harder to move on.

"But I'm not ready to move on," she added.

**N. Naples man faces murder charge in death of Florida patrolman
Published on Friday, July 2, 2004, in the Naples Daily News**

A North Naples man already wanted in Collier County for skipping out on bond in a burglary case now faces murder charges elsewhere in Florida involving the death of a highway patrolman who crashed his car and died while chasing the suspect and his girlfriend.

Gregory Hampton Platt, 31, faces felony charges in three Florida counties. A grand jury in Lake City, Columbia County, indicted Platt on charges of second-degree murder, fleeing the scene of a crash with death, fleeing a law enforcement officer in a high-speed chase and driving with a suspended license.

If convicted, Platt could face a life sentence plus 35 more years in prison on the other three charges, said Todd Hingson, the assistant state attorney handling the case in Columbia Circuit Court.

Platt was arrested in Crystal River, Citrus County, after authorities said he eluded the pursuit of Highway Patrol Sgt. George "Andy" Brown III on April 28. Platt was driving a purple Dodge Neon with the back window missing when Trooper Brown attempted to pull him over. Platt refused, instead speeding up, authorities said.

During the chase, Platt slammed on the brakes, and Brown tried to stop to avoid hitting Platt. Instead, Brown slammed into a tree and died instantly, according to witnesses.

Platt and his girlfriend, North Naples resident Kelly Jean Smith, then fled about 100 miles south from Lake City to Crystal River, north of Tampa. A state agricultural police officer there saw the car matched a description of the car Brown was chasing. Citrus County deputies gave chase. Platt hit a parked car and a Sheriff's Office patrol car before fleeing on foot, according to the arrest report. He was captured soon afterward.

He's charged in Citrus County with resisting arrest without violence, aggravated battery on a law enforcement officer, fleeing and eluding and driving with a suspended license. Columbia County prosecutors investigated and took the case to a grand jury, which issued the murder indictment.

Platt is held on no bond at the Citrus County Jail.

Smith was charged in Citrus County with misdemeanor drug possession and resisting arrest and was released on \$10,000 bond May 1. She faces no charges in Collier and hasn't been arrested in connection with the trooper's death. Hingson said Smith was only a passenger, while Platt is responsible for the trooper's death.

"It's basically homicide by an act that's imminently dangerous to another, with a depraved mind," Hingson said. He added that second-degree murder requires the prosecutor to prove the defendant intended to commit the act that's dangerous, such as running from the authorities. The prosecutor doesn't have to prove the defendant intended to kill anyone during that act.

Platt is set for arraignment Aug. 4. He has yet to enter a plea or hire a lawyer.

"He may also qualify for enhanced sentencing as a habitual offender," Hingson said. That means the judge could double the sentence, which must be served day for day with no time off for good behavior in prison.

Hingson wouldn't comment on the facts and said he hasn't charged Smith with anything in Columbia County.

"She likely could face some criminal charges up in Columbia County, not necessarily related to the trooper's death," Hingson said.

The crash that killed Brown occurred less than a week after Platt, 110 Rose Blvd., missed a mandatory appearance in Collier Circuit Court. Platt is charged with three counts of burglary of a dwelling and three counts of grand theft and was out of jail on \$60,000 bond. He could face up to 40 years in prison if he's convicted.

A warrant for his arrest is active in Collier County, said Assistant State Attorney Dave Scuderi. The charges likely will be dealt with after the more serious case is disposed of in Columbia County.

Platt's criminal history includes a seven-year prison term between 1992 and 1999 on charges of robbery, robbery with a firearm, aggravated battery and four counts of kidnapping.

When Platt fled the charges in Collier, he and Smith, 25, 210 Rose Blvd., went to Lake City, in the Panhandle of Florida. Both were wanted for questioning in other burglaries.

Brown is the first FHP trooper to die in the line of duty since Brad Crooks was shot and killed in Hillsborough County in 1998.

Governor lauds deputies for chase, capture
Published on Friday, June 25, 2004, in the St. Petersburg Times

Gov. Jeb Bush and the Cabinet honored two Citrus County sheriff's deputies Thursday in Tallahassee.

Deputies Dan Slingerland and Matt Taylor arrested Gregory H. Platt on April 27 after a chase through west Citrus. Platt was fleeing Columbia County, where a Florida Highway Patrol trooper had driven off the road and died while trying to stop Platt on suspicion of speeding.

The Citrus deputies, driving together, chased Platt's vehicle on U.S. 19 and State Road 44. According to official accounts, Platt's vehicle struck theirs at SR 44 and County Road 486.

The deputies chased Platt on foot and arrested him.

Platt now awaits trial on a charge of second-degree murder. Investigators believe FHP Sgt. George A. "Andy" Brown III, 54, tried to stop Platt on Columbia County Road 341, near Lake City. Platt suddenly braked, and Brown lost control of his cruiser and hit an oak tree as he tried to avoid the Plymouth Neon.

Based on skid marks and witnesses' statements, officers suspect Platt intended to cause Brown to lose control.

Platt, 31, of Naples, also is charged with driving with a suspended license which resulted in a death, fleeing and eluding a police officer, and failing to stop in an accident involving a death. He also faces charges in connection with the Citrus part of the chase.

Sheriff's spokeswoman Gail Tierney said FHP requested that the governor and Cabinet honor the Citrus deputies. Among those present at the ceremony Thursday was Sheriff Jeff Dawsy.

Also Thursday, Slingerland and Taylor were honored during a presentation at the FHP academy in Tallahassee.

Community gathers to pay respects to fallen officers
Published on Wednesday, June 30, 2004, in the Lake City Reporter

Dark skies and rain didn't deter more than 100 people from attending a ceremony to honor Columbia County's fallen public service workers who died in the line of duty.

Tuesday evening the Third Annual Columbia County Memorial Celebration of Life was held at Lake DeSoto where local residents didn't mind getting wet to pay homage to local heroes who had given their lives while on duty.

Mike Burroughs, Florida Highway Patrol Troop B, public information officer said more than 15 FHP troopers and members of Troop B FHP Auxiliary attended the ceremony. He said the ceremony allowed closure following the death of FHP Trooper Sgt. Andy Brown earlier in the year.

"For us, it's still a sad day to rehash the death of Sgt. Brown all over again; however, it is the proper thing to do to honor him," Burroughs said. "It's also part of the healing process for troopers as we still mourn the loss of Sgt. Andy Brown."

Burroughs said troopers are still waiting on closure in the case, even though charges have been filed.

"To bring closure to Sgt. Brown's death would expedite that healing process for Troop B and all the troopers and their families," he said. "He's still sadly missed."

Columbia County Sheriff Frank Owens said he was not surprised by the amount of people in attendance and actually expected the number to continue to grow.

"It's a solemn moment - a moment of honor and reverence, a moment when kids and grandkids will have a moment of history in learning about their fathers, grandfathers and grandmothers who were here in this profession and gave the ultimate sacrifice. The ceremony is something to help them understand that we as a community appreciate the sacrifice that those individuals made."

Owens said he believed the importance of having a public-safety memorial to honor the fallen heroes is worthwhile as people come from several states to pay homage to their fallen relatives and friends.

"Since putting the public safety memorial up, we've added two names," he said. "I'm just glad people came out. The storm gave us a little bit of a fright, but people came out."

At the end of the ceremony, FHP Troop B Commander Rick Carpenter unveiled the public safety memorial with the names Charles B. Stafford, a police officer from Columbia County who was killed in Miami Springs in 1991, and FHP Trooper Sgt. Andy Brown who was killed earlier in the year.

Driver in chase gets more bad news from jail

Published on Wednesday, June 12, 2004, in the St. Petersburg Times

A man is indicted in the death of a trooper in a multicounty chase that ended in a crash.

A Columbia County grand jury on Thursday indicted a man already in custody in Citrus County on a charge of second-degree murder in connection with the April death of a Florida Highway Patrol trooper.

In the indictment, Gregory Hampton Platt, 31, of Naples, also was charged with driving with a suspended license which resulted in death, fleeing and eluding a police officer, and failing to stop in an accident involving death, according to an arrest report.

On Friday afternoon, Platt was being held at the Citrus County jail without bail.

When he was served with the Columbia County arrest warrant, Platt was being held on Citrus County sheriff's charges of two counts of aggravated battery with a deadly weapon on a law enforcement officer, and one count each of fleeing and eluding a police officer, resisting or obstructing an officer without violence, and driving with a suspended license.

The Citrus charges came after a chase that ended in a crash east of Crystal River on April 27. That morning, FHP Sgt. George A. "Andy" Brown III, 54, tried to stop a speeder on

County Road 341 in Columbia County, near Lake City. Brown's patrol car crashed and the trooper was found dead inside.

Platt's passenger, Kelly Jean Smith, 25, also of Naples, also was arrested that day. She was released from the Citrus County jail on May 1 after posting \$10,000 bail.

Asked if Smith would face additional charges, FHP chief spokesman Maj. Ernesto Duarte declined to comment, saying the investigation is still open.

He also declined to discuss in detail what led FHP traffic homicide investigators to link Platt to the trooper's crash, saying only that there were "distinct characteristics that we know were involved in the (Columbia County) incident and the actual crash in Citrus County."

FHP officials turned over evidence to the state attorney's office in Columbia County, Duarte said.

Man charged in trooper's death

Published on Tuesday, June 11, 2004, in the Lake City Reporter

A grand jury issued an indictment charging Gregory Hampton Platt with the death of Florida Highway Patrol Trooper Sgt. George "Andy" Brown III.

Platt, 31, of Naples, was charged with second degree murder, felony fleeing and eluding, driving with a suspended license resulting in death and leaving the scene of an accident involving death.

"We're very pleased with everything," said Assistant State Attorney Todd Hingson, who directed the grand jury. "It is the highest charge possible."

The indictment was sealed until Platt could be officially served and arrested Thursday evening at Columbia County Detention Center.

Platt will be arraigned in Columbia County in the next few weeks. He has already been transported back to Citrus County where he has also been indicted on charges related to eluding law enforcement there.

It is not yet known which trial will be held first. It is more common for the worse case to be tried first, Hingson said.

Platt is believed to be the driver of the car that was being pursued by Brown on Sisters Welcome Road when the trooper's FHP Camaro ran off the road and struck a tree. Brown was pronounced dead at the scene.

A preliminary report from the FHP stated that it is possible Platt used his emergency brake when Brown was behind him, which could have been why the trooper lost control.

Kelly Jean Smith, 25, of Naples, is also believed to have been in the car with Platt.

They were caught in Crystal River after being pursued by Citrus County sheriff's deputies.

The 21-member grand jury is finished with all of the decisions for this trial term.

Letter to the Editor: Sgt. Andy Brown

Published on Wednesday, June 2, 2004, in the Lake City Reporter

It has been some time since we suffered the tragic loss of Sgt. Andy Brown to a traffic accident. On behalf of the Florida Highway Patrol Troop B, Sgt. Brown's son and his extended family, I would like to offer our thanks to the entire community for their support, compassion and prayers during the past week.

To those of you who phoned our office, Lake City Middle School, or individual members of our agency with offers of personal assistance, your kindness and concern during this time was greatly appreciated. To Brad Wheeler and his staff at Gateway Memorial Funeral Home, thank you for your professionalism and guidance. To the businesses who have honored Sgt. Brown on their signs or with donations to our post-funeral dinner, I thank you. I would also like to thank Pastor Lonnie Johns and the members of the congregation of Christ Central Ministries who spent time adding seating to their church to accommodate those attending Sgt. Brown's funeral. Finally, to the members of the Lake City Fire Department, Lake City Police Department and the Columbia County Sheriff's Office, please accept my sincere gratitude for all the assistance you rendered our agency during this difficult week.

Despite the deep sadness we have experienced, it is gratifying to know that we live in such a supportive and caring community.

Major Rick Carpenter
Lake City

A dutiful memorial

Published on Friday, May 7, 2004, in the Gainesville Sun

Starke - The men and women charged with maintaining law and order in Bradford and Union counties turned out on Thursday evening to remember the 20 officers before them who died in the line of duty in those counties.

Deputies, police officers, correctional officers, motor carrier compliance officers and school crossing guards attended the annual Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Day ceremony.

This year the memorial service came at the end of a 10-day period in which four officers were killed in separate incidents around the state, including the death of a Lake City trooper.

"Law enforcement has had a bad couple of weeks," Union County Sheriff Jerry Whitehead told the crowd of nearly 300 who gathered at the Bradford County Fairgrounds.

Whitehead's father, John, was sheriff for more than 30 years, including the time in 1961 when two Union County deputies were killed on the same day.

"As a young boy, I remember my father crying for the first time when that happened," said Jerry Whitehead, who was first elected sheriff in 1984. "One of those deputies - Ronald Jackson - was my first cousin."

Death in the line of duty is something that is long remembered in the two counties that used to be one.

As State Attorney Bill Cervone read the roll of those killed on duty, related survivors were asked to stand. Four generations of the Epperson family rose when the 1885 death of Sheriff George W. Epperson and the 1890 death of Sheriff Henry W. Epperson were read.

"This is the first time I have been able to come to this (memorial), and it was so beautiful, so emotional," said Betty Epperson Mizelle of Williston. George was her paternal great-grandfather and Henry was her great-uncle.

More recently - on April 27 - Florida Highway Patrol Trooper Sgt. George A. "Andy" Brown III was killed when his car crashed while he prepared to overtake a driver in Columbia County.

On Thursday evening, Brown's love for his job was recalled by FHP Lt. Tim Hines.

Brown had retired from the patrol, but returned to work in less than a year and was explaining his decision to Hines last summer when he said something prophetic.

"He told me, 'I love this job - I could do it until I die,' " Hines said.

Marion County Sheriff's Officer Chief of Staff Fred LaTorre reminded the crowd that being killed in the line of duty is nothing new to law enforcement or correctional officers. He said that since the first line of duty death - when a New York deputy was shot and killed in 1792 - America has had more than 16,500 officers killed.

"In the United States, on average one law enforcement officer is killed every 53 hours," LaTorre said. "Every time an officer leaves his home, it's unknown whether he will return."

Instead of mourning the passing of so many, LaTorre urged the crowd to celebrate the efforts of those killed in the line of duty by recalling a quote from Abraham Lincoln.

"In the end, it's not the years in your life that count, but the life in your years."

**Report: Suspect suddenly braked, caused deadly trooper crash
Published on Wednesday, May 5, 2004, in the Tallahassee Democrat**

GAINESVILLE, Fla. - A Florida Highway Patrol trooper who died in a car accident last month lost control of his vehicle during a high-speed chase after the suspect he was following suddenly braked, according to a preliminary crash report.

Sgt. George "Andy" Brown III, 54, tried to avoid hitting the Plymouth Neon in front of him, but lost control of his cruiser and hit an oak tree, according to the report released Tuesday by the highway patrol.

Based on skid marks and witness statements, officers believe the driver of the Neon braked with the intent of causing Brown to lose control, the report said.

Gregory Hampton Platt, 31, and Kelly Jean Smith, 25, were arrested in Citrus County charged with fleeing police there several hours after Brown's death. Troopers believe they were in the vehicle that Brown was trying to stop, but they have not been charged in connection with his death.

Brown and the Neon were both traveling about 80 mph before the crash, investigators said. The speed limit was 45 mph.

Brown was the first FHP trooper to die in the line of duty since 1998, and the 38th trooper to die in Florida since the FHP started keeping records in 1941. Seventeen of those were shot, 15 died in auto crashes, five died in plane crashes and one died in an explosion.

**Report: Trooper tried to avoid hitting car
Published on Wednesday, May 5, 2004, in the Gainesville Sun**

A Florida Highway Patrol trooper, killed in a car accident last month, died after the driver of the vehicle he was following suddenly braked, a preliminary crash report states.

Sgt. George "Andy" Brown III tried to avoid hitting the other car but instead lost control of his patrol Chevrolet Camaro, hitting a large oak tree. On Tuesday, FHP released the report, part of their on-going investigation into the veteran trooper's death on April 27.

Investigators estimated both Brown and the driver of the car he was following, Gregory H. Platt of Naples, were traveling at about 80 mph on Columbia County Road 341 at the time of the crash. The posted speed limit on the road is 45 mph.

The report also says officers believe Platt braked his Plymouth Neon "with the intent of causing (Brown) to lose control." That information was based on skid marks left by both vehicles and witness statements.

FHP Lt. Mike Burroughs said, "It was pretty apparent that was the action that caused Sgt. Brown to take evasive action."

But the report does not elaborate on why Brown tried to stop Platt's car, except that he tried to overtake the Neon for a traffic violation.

"That's the one missing part of the puzzle that's yet to reveal itself," Burroughs said.

Under FHP policy, troopers can "overtake" another vehicle when the driver commits a traffic violation, Burroughs said. Troopers can "pursue" a vehicle only when trying to catch someone involved in crimes of violence or "forcible felonies." The difference between the two actions includes how long and how far the trooper follows another car and how long it's clear to the other driver that the trooper is trying to make a stop.

"If the picture were clearer for us, we could be able to clearly say whether or not it would have been termed a pursuit," Burroughs said.

Investigators believe Brown may have noticed the Neon had a broken rear windshield and no license tag when it passed him as he was heading north on CR 341. The Neon was headed south.

"We feel that he might have thought it was stolen or recently broken into," Burroughs said.

Platt's car was "fleeing" from Brown, who had his lights flashing and siren activated, according to the report. Another driver told investigators the two cars passed her at "a high rate of speed," when the Neon suddenly braked.

Brown, trying to avoid hitting the Neon, lost control of the patrol car, the report states. The Camaro went off the road, onto the shoulder, down a slope, through a ditch and up an embankment. Brown continued struggling to bring the car under control before hitting the tree. The Neon left the scene of the crash.

"We do not see any type of flaw with the overtaking," Burroughs said when asked about the crash. "What we do know made the difference in this case was the abrupt braking action applied by the violator vehicle in what we believe was an attempt to evade Sgt. Brown. That is what started the whole chain of events."

Third Judicial Circuit State Attorney Jerry Blair, whose office is reviewing the case, could not be reached late Tuesday to comment on possible charges.

Troopers are expected to finish their investigation, which would include data from a black box in Brown's Camaro gauging how the car was operated, by late June.

Brown, 31, remains in custody at the Citrus County jail. A passenger in the Neon, Kelly Smith, 25, of Naples, has been released, jail employees said. The two have not been charged in connection with Brown's death but are facing charges stemming from a chase through Levy and Citrus counties after the Columbia County accident.

Troopers have spoken with Smith, Burroughs said.

Anyone with information about the case including why Brown was following the Neon is asked to call FHP toll-free at (800) 395-8248.

FHP Fatal Crash Report Released **Published on Tuesday, May 4, 2004, on WCJB TV 20 News**

Florida Highway Patrol trooper George "Andy" Brown lost his life one week ago Tuesday during a high speed pursuit in Columbia County. Tuesday, F.H.P. officials released the details of his fatal crash.

After hearing witness reports, investigators with the F.H.P. believe the crash was caused by the fleeing driver's desperate and deadly actions. They say driver Gregory Platt and his

passenger Kelly Smith of Naples, were fleeing from Brown last Tuesday on C.R. 341 when Platt slammed on the breaks.

Spokesperson for the F.H.P. Mike Burroughs says, "As Sgt. Brown was making an attempt to overtake him, he applied his brake in an evasive manner in an attempt more or less to flee or get away from Sgt. Brown."

Brown lost control of his vehicle and crashed into the woods...the accident claimed his life. Tuesday, the Naples couple is still in the Citrus County jail, held on charges related to the chase. F.H.P. Investigators say they need at least six weeks to decide exactly what the charges related to the accident will be.

At trooper's funeral, legend among ranks remembered
Published on Saturday, May 1, 2004, in the Gainesville Sun

More than 1,200 people turned out Friday afternoon to bid a final farewell to Florida Highway Patrol Sgt. George A. "Andy" Brown III, the trooper killed in the line of duty on Tuesday.

During a funeral service at Christ Central Ministries, Brown, 54, of Lake City was remembered as "one of Florida's best known bears in the air" for his work as a pilot during his 34-year career as a trooper.

FHP Director Col. Christopher A. Knight was among those eulogizing Brown. He recalled that Brown was pointed out as a role model to cadets training to be troopers.

"We would tell out recruits to 'go be just like him,' " Knight told the mourners during the 90-minute funeral service. "He had minimal tolerance, if any, for people who didn't produce."

As an example of Brown's expectations of his colleagues, Knight recalled that once when he was a captain supervising Brown in the Palatka area, the two of them were working a traffic detail together. When Brown spotted traffic violators from a plane, he directed Knight and others on the ground to the errant drivers. At one point, Knight was not working fast enough to suit Brown.

"Over the radio he told me, 'Captain, with all due respect, if you look down there is a pedal by your right foot that is an accelerator,' " Knight recalled to the amusement of the hundreds of troopers in attendance who now report to Knight.

Several other anecdotes about Brown's career and personal life were recalled by those who spoke, including his friend of 32 years, retired Trooper Ken Edmunds. He recalled stopping drivers and telling them that they had been spotted by an FHP plane for speeding or another violations. Drivers who didn't believe him were often treated to the sight of Brown's plane dipping low enough for them to spot the former Marine wiggling the wings.

"That was pretty convincing," Edmunds said.

Because of his strict enforcement of Florida's traffic laws, Brown became a legend among troopers, who would warn even each other to "go slow through Troop B," the counties of North Central Florida where Brown patrolled in the final years of his career, Edmunds said.

"We will never know how many lives he saved by his strict dedication," Edmunds said.

What state officials still don't know is exactly why Brown's car left the pavement a few miles from the church on Tuesday morning as he was preparing to make a traffic stop. Brown's 2001 FHP Camaro crashed into several trees and he was pronounced dead at the scene.

Preliminary autopsy results showed no apparent reason for him to have lost control of his car. The possible driver of the car Brown was preparing to stop was arrested in Citrus County a few hours later and is being held there on multiple charges, but none directly related to Brown's crash.

Making Brown's death even more tragic is the son he left behind.

Tucker Brown is 13 years old. His mother died of cancer earlier this year. Until the end of the school year, Tucker will live with another trooper's family with a son of about the same age who was a friend of Tucker's. Members of Tucker's extended family are expected to make a decision soon on who will become his guardian. An account for Tucker has been established at the Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles Credit Union in Tallahassee.

Tucker was seated between his father's parents in the front row of the funeral, which was attended by law enforcement officials from as far away as Oklahoma.

The young teenager was presented with his father's campaign hat - the stiff brimmed hat that is a part of the trooper's uniform - before the mourners filed out of the church for a 21-gun salute and the playing of taps by Marines, followed by the last call over the FHP radio system for 271, the FHP number that was used to call for Sgt. Andy Brown.

Hundreds gather to remember fallen trooper
Published on Saturday, May 1, 2004, in the Lake City Reporter

A lone Florida Highway Patrol trooper walked slowly and deliberately down the aisle, in his hands covered with pristine white gloves was the agency's standard uniform "campaign hat" of Sgt. George "Andy" Brown III.

With about 750 people gathered at Christ Central Ministries Friday watching, he placed the hat on a table filled with pictures and effects of Brown before the church altar.

The crowd of friends, family and law enforcement from all over the state sat silently, with many lowering their heads in respect.

It was a symbolic moment for the honor of Brown, 55, who died in a wreck Tuesday while doing what he loved: Being a trooper for the Florida Highway Patrol.

"He was the kind of trooper we gave to the recruits and said 'go be just like him,' " Col. Chris Knight, FHP director, was soon telling the audience.

With a mixture of stories, scripture and song, Brown was eulogized. Those in attendance recognized his memory with their laughter and tears. It was the pageantry of law enforcement tradition combined with personal accounts that were used to celebrate the life of a father, son, brother, Marine, trooper and friend.

Knight read an e-mail message from a man who as a boy described himself as underprivileged and heading for trouble. Brown befriended the child and took an interest in his future, even bought him his first bicycle and took him out to dinner on occasion. He later joined the U.S. Coast Guard.

Through the stories of kindness from those who knew him best, a picture of Brown became complete, matching the images projected on a large screen behind the church's altar, which cycled during the service.

They were slides of Brown from childhood to present. In each image from boy to man, the lines of the face grew deeper, but the eyes and smile remained the same.

"If I live to be 100 or I go tomorrow, Andy Brown will always be the most dearest person to me and my family," said Ken Evans of Jacksonville, close friend and retired FHP trooper.

Evans spoke at length during the service, telling the crowd stories of the days he and Brown first met back in 1970 at the FHP Troop E office in Miami. Through the years, they either followed each other to different FHP offices or kept in touch like the extended family they were.

While both were stationed in Kissimmee, Evans said Brown proposed they become pilots after taking and passing the FHP's test to become a corporal.

"I said 'I don't know how to fly anything.' He said 'Well neither do I,' " Evans said.

He said Brown decided he would take a leave from work, get a \$10,000 loan to live on and get his pilot's license to qualify for the FHP flight division. Brown then did just that.

Soon afterwards, the two friends were working the highways around Kissimmee helping to catch traffic violators with one in the air and the other on the ground. Their record in a day of working together was 250 tickets, Evans said.

With Evans' account, everyone who didn't already know Brown a little better. Other than being an example trooper, he said Brown also loved to eat, particularly at Sonny's, where he loved the barbecue but was even more fond of the sweet tea. He purchased books for Evans' wife and was considered "Uncle Andy" to his son, Jackson.

"I was never a friend of Andy's because we were family," Evans said.

He turned to Brown's 13-year-old son Tucker, telling him how he was his father's highest priority and vowing his family's assistance.

When Brown's father, George Brown Jr., spoke, he did it simply and sorrowfully, but as if he were talking directly to his son, not the sea of people before him.

"I wanted to say goodbye son ... we love you," he said. "We love his son ... Tucker."

George Brown thanked the FHP, his "second family," for their support and help over his own 25-year career and especially during the past week.

Brown's sister, Connie Whalen of Des Moines, Iowa, said her brother's death left a hole in her heart. But with the time she has spent with her family this week, she said "the more I realize that Andy instilled a love in us that continues to grow in us and fill in that hole."

Whalen also told people her "little brother" loved the works of authors Henry David Thoreau and Mark Twain.

Though life was not always easy, Whalen said Brown learned to be happy no matter what the world threw at him.

"He said, 'You have to put a little joy in every day,' " she said. "He loved us dearly, he still does."

Intermittently, between the personal accounts and scripture, the church was filled by the mournful sound of bagpipers from the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office.

Outside the church following the services, Marines fired rifles in salute while members of the FHP and other law enforcement agencies faced the family in salute, just before the traditional, solemn trumpeting of "Reveille" was played.

"It was most definitely a fitting tribute," said Lt. Mike Burroughs, FHP Troop B public information officer.

Burroughs said the friends, family and law enforcement from all over the state were representative of the type of person Brown was.

The FHP even brought 36 trooper recruits to the services. Burroughs said this was an opportunity to show those potential troopers there are inherent dangers to being in law enforcement and it is a commitment one makes.

Well known as a trooper who kept his equipment in perfect condition and expected nothing less than a best effort, Brown was often used as a counselor for recruits in Tallahassee.

Knight said pilots aren't normally allowed to because they're needed above the roads to deter speeders, but the FHP decided lessons Brown had to offer were too valuable not to use.

He said words people have been consistently using to describe Brown are "impeccable, immaculate, professional and personable."

It seems even before his death Brown was helping to teach those in mourning over his loss how to cope.

As one of his favorite quotes states: "What makes you a man is what you do when the storm comes."

Lake City Service Honors Trooper Killed In Pursuit
Published on Friday, April 30, 2004, on WJXT (Jacksonville) News

LAKE CITY, Fla. -- Family, friends and hundreds of fellow law enforcement officers gathered Friday to remember a veteran Florida Highway Patrol trooper who died Tuesday in pursuit of a suspect vehicle.

Sgt. George "Andy" Brown III died Tuesday morning after losing control of his cruiser while trying to stop another vehicle about six miles south of Lake City. Investigators say his squad car left the road and slammed into several trees.

Mourners packed into Christ Central Ministries on Sisters Welcome Road -- not far from the accident scene -- to remember the fallen officer. Troopers from several states came to pay their respects.

Brown's parents spoke, and his father tearfully said goodbye to his son. The memorial was followed by a 21-gun salute.

Brown, 54, had been a trooper since July 1970, following in his father's footsteps. Brown doubled as a "Bear in the Air," the nickname given to troopers who also pilot FHP spotter aircraft.

He retired in 1996 after a career that saw assignments in southeast and in northeast Florida, but returned to the force after a year off and was stationed in Lake City.

"He truly had the safety of the public at heart," Burroughs said. "He truly believed in enforcing traffic laws."

The FHP said speed was a factor in Brown's crash, but gave few other details about the chase.

After the crash, three witnesses gave officers a description of the car driven by Platt, a purple Dodge Neon, with the back window missing.

Officials believe a Naples couple was in the vehicle that Brown was trying to stop.

Hours later, police stopped a Naples couple -- Gregory Hampton Platt, 31, and Kelly Jean Smith, 25 -- in south Citrus County after a two-county chase. Police said Platt tried to run, but he was quickly arrested. Smith was arrested in the car.

They are being held without bond, charged with fleeing police there. They do not currently face any charges related to Brown's death.

According to the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, Platt has a prior criminal history including burglary, grand theft, robbery and aggravated battery. He was released from prison in 1999.

Brown was the first FHP trooper to die in the line of duty since 1998 and becomes the 38th trooper to die in Florida since the FHP started keeping records in 1941.

Seventeen of those were shot, 15 died in auto crashes, five died in plane crashes and one died in an explosion.

Farewell to A Trooper's Trooper

Published on Friday, April 30, 2004, in the First Coast News

LAKE CITY, FL -- Law enforcement from across Florida attended a memorial service in Lake City for Sergeant Andy Brown. Brown, 55, was killed in the line of duty this week while attempting to make a traffic stop outside of Lake City.

Brown, who once retired and then rejoined the Highway Patrol had 34 years of service in all parts of Florida. Fellow troopers remember Brown as a trooper's trooper. His friends who served with Brown say he had a passion for perfection and professionalism. Chris Knight, who heads up the Highway Patrol, said, "He was the kind of trooper we gave to recruits and say, 'go be like him.'"

Brown leaves behind a 13 year old son, Tucker. His father also served and retired from the Florida Highway Patrol.

Memorial services set for trooper

Published on Friday, April 30, 2004, in the Lake City Reporter

Hundreds of Florida Highway Patrol troopers and other area law enforcement officers will gather in Lake City today with family members to honor the life of Sgt. George "Andy" Brown III.

Brown, 55, died Tuesday morning in the line of duty when his FHP Chevrolet Camaro crashed into a wooded area alongside Sisters Welcome Road, south of Lake City. Lt. Mike Burroughs, FHP Troop B public information officer, said accommodations would be made for up to 1,000 people for the private services this afternoon at Christ Central Ministries.

"It makes you proud, even during sad times such as this, to see how we pull together and deal with these type of issues," he said.

Burroughs said the FHP has coordinated amongst its supervisors and troopers to create a service that will include an honor guard, a 21-gun salute and a military fly-over. These observances will be in addition to the expected convoy of law enforcement vehicles from around the area and state.

The goal, he said, is "to make sure that Sgt. Brown is eulogized in a way that will honor his career."

The FHP's Jacksonville-based Troop G will provide an honor guard for the 1 p.m. service and eight motorcycle escorts for the funeral procession to the church and the reception to follow at the Columbia County Fairgrounds.

For much of his career, Brown worked with the nine-county Troop G, primarily working as a traffic control pilot and later as a district sergeant.

Lt. Bill Leeper, Troop G public information officer, said Brown's death has saddened those who knew him on and off duty.

"He was one of a kind," Leeper said. "He had a passion for traffic law enforcement and he loved his job and he loved the Florida Highway Patrol. And he wound up dying doing what he loved to do, and that's being a state trooper and going after bad guys."

But as serious as he was about doing his job, Leeper said Brown was also known for his great sense of humor.

"He always had a joke to tell and he would make people around him smile," he said.

Brown was born in Oil City, Penn., on Oct. 27, 1948, before moving with his family to Florida in 1950. He graduated from Titusville High School in 1967.

On July 11, 1967, Brown joined the U.S. Marine Corps and, after serving in Vietnam, was later honorably discharged as a lance corporal on Feb. 14, 1969.

Brown began his career with the FHP on July 6, 1970, becoming a second-generation trooper, following in the footsteps of his father.

Leeper said Brown had grown up around the FHP and always knew he wanted to become a trooper.

Brown was a member of the FHP's 37th Recruit Class, where he served as a platoon leader. His first duty assignment was to Troop E in Miami.

He later served with Troop D in Kissimmee, Bunnell and Deland before being promoted to corporal in 1982 and assigned to Troop G in Palatka as a law enforcement airplane pilot.

Leeper remembers Brown as a "great pilot" who flew him over the scene where a wreck had occurred for aerial photos during a traffic homicide investigation.

"He loved to fly," he said.

Brown also had more than a passing interest in Corvettes and motorcycles. He was a Civil War buff and Titanic aficionado.

Brown continued to serve as an FHP pilot in Sanford and Deland for Troop D before returning again to Troop G in 1985, this time in Jacksonville. But in 1986, he went back to Palatka, where he remained until his first retirement on June 30, 1996.

Leeper said Brown moved to Texas following retirement, but returned to Florida in less than a year and re-applied for employment with the FHP. He was assigned as Troop B's pilot and flew out of the Lake City Municipal Airport.

Brown died at about 10:05 a.m. Tuesday, as he was going after a 1998 Plymouth Neon he had passed on Sisters Welcome Road before his fatal wreck.

Gregory Hampton Platt, 31, and Kelly Jean Smith, 25, both of Naples, were arrested several hours later in Crystal River after a pursuit by Citrus County sheriff's deputies.

The FHP believes Platt and Smith were the occupants of the Neon Brown attempted to pull over for an unknown violation on Sisters Welcome Road. It is still unknown why Platt and Smith were in Lake City or what they were doing on Sisters Welcome Road, but Burroughs said the FHP did learn the couple was recently evicted from a residence in Naples.

Burroughs said the FHP also believes it was about a minute from the time Brown first began going after the vehicle and his wreck.

Platt and Smith were still being held in Citrus County on unrelated charges Thursday. No charges have been filed in Columbia County against them, but both are being interviewed as part of an ongoing FHP traffic homicide investigation. Charges are likely to be forthcoming from the State Attorney's Office and will depend on the results of the investigation.

"We are gradually moving closer," Burroughs said. "That's still in the process of working up to the charges and also the extradition (bringing them back to Columbia County if charges are brought against them)."

Brown is survived by his 13-year-old son Tucker; father George A. Brown Jr. and stepmother Charlsey Brown of Port Orange; sister, Connie Whalen and niece Tasha Gould of Des Moines, Iowa; mother Elizabeth Anderson and stepfather Richard "Dick" Anderson, both of Ocala.

Burroughs said Maj. Rick Carpenter, Troop B commander, and his family have been taking care of Brown's son since his death.

In what is a "tight-knit" extended FHP family, he said, troopers won't hesitate to take care of each others' loved ones in times of need.

In lieu of flowers, the family is requesting donations be made in Brown's memory to the Westview Boy's Home at P.O. Box 553, Hollis, OK 73550-0553, for which he was an advocate.

Police consider chase charges

Published on Friday, April 30, 2004, in the Inverness Citrus County Chronicle

Three days after a Florida Highway Patrolman was killed in the line of duty, no charges have been filed against a Naples man authorities believe is connected to the crash.

Gregory Platt, 31, was arrested Tuesday afternoon in Citrus County on a host of unrelated charges, following a two-county chase that started in Levy County.

He remains incarcerated at the Citrus County Detention Facility in Lecanto, where he's being held without bond.

Platt's passenger, Kelly Jean Smith, 25, was also arrested following the chase and crash that ended in Citrus County.

She is being held in lieu of a \$10,000 bond.

Authorities believe Platt's Plymouth Neon was the same vehicle that Sgt. George A. "Andy" Brown III was preparing to pursue in Columbia County on Tuesday morning when he crashed.

Brown radioed a description of the vehicle and its driver before crashing, authorities said.

Brown was found dead at the scene.

FHP spokesman Lt. Mike Burroughs said investigators are continuing to gather evidence in the case.

He said the preliminary results of an autopsy conducted Wednesday in Jacksonville yielded no clues as to what caused the crash.

"We've begun a very tedious and methodical investigative process to link them back to the scene at the time of the crash," Burroughs said. "We're doing that through the process of collecting physical evidence and witness statements."

According to a pair of Lake City employees working near the crash scene, they saw two people in a Neon leave the scene "whooping and hollering" as they were driving away following the crash, Burroughs said.

He said another witness told investigators that she saw a dark-colored Neon and Brown's Chevrolet Camaro patrol car pass her as she drove along County Road 341, six miles south of Lake City.

Shortly after they passed her, the woman said she saw Brown crash into a nearby wooded area, Burroughs said.

Burroughs said investigators are also looking into why Brown was pursuing the vehicle and how fast he was going when he crashed.

Investigators also are exploring if Brown had any previous contact with Platt.

Burroughs said investigators are pulling tickets recently issued by Brown and cross-checking with other law enforcement agencies in the area.

He added that two state attorneys are working closely with the FHP investigation team discussing the logistics of filing charges and the possibility of extradition.

Crystal River Police Chief Gordon Rowland said his agency is looking at the possibility of filing additional charges against Platt on two counts of aggravated assault on a law enforcement officer. Those possible charges stem from the chase where Rowland said Platt acted as if he were going to ram two city patrol cars.

A funeral for Brown is planned for 1 p.m. today in Lake City.

Thousands of law enforcement officers from Florida and Georgia plan to attend the funeral.

Family remembers trooper's dedication

Published on Friday, April 30, 2004, in the Ocala Star-Banner

OCALA - Growing up, Sgt. George A. "Andy" Brown III always knew he wanted to follow in the footsteps of his father and become a state trooper.

His mother, Elizabeth "Betsy" Anderson, said it was the only thing he ever wanted to do, even though she questioned why.

"I said to him, 'Andy, how can you possibly want to be a trooper when you're a trooper's child and have seen what they go through?' "

"He said, 'Momma, trooper's kids make the best kind of troopers.' "

On Tuesday, his lifelong dream ended when he lost control of his car while trying to make a traffic stop in Columbia County, about six miles south of Lake City. Brown was pronounced dead at the scene. It was the 38th time a Florida State Trooper has been killed in the line of duty.

"It never was work to Andy. It was his whole life," Anderson said. "He enjoyed every day that he worked. He just loved what he did."

As of Thursday, no charges had been filed against two people who were stopped in Citrus County in connection with his death against two people who were stopped in Citrus County. Gregory Hampton Platt, 31, and Kelly Jean Smith 25, of Naples, face a number of charges, especially Platt, who was charged with two counts of aggravated battery for allegedly ramming his car into a patrol car with deputies inside. Platt is being held without bail, Smith's bail is set at \$10,000.

Lt. Mike Burroughs, public information officer for Troop B, Florida Highway Patrol, said Sgt. Brown was a model trooper. His personnel file is full of letters of commendation from motorists he stopped to help.

"He had a heart for helping people," he said. "He was our troop pilot. Not only did he enforce traffic from the ground, he also enforced it from the air."

A native of Oil City, Pa., he moved to Florida in 1950. Sgt. Brown was a 34-year veteran of the FHP, serving as platoon leader for the 37th Recruit Class. He also served in the U.S. Marine Corps during Vietnam; was a member of the Bunnell Masonic Lodge No. 200, the Broken Spoke and was an advocate for the Westview Boy's Home.

Anderson said her son was proud of his career choice and shared his enthusiasm with those he taught.

"You've got to enjoy what you're doing to be a good trooper," she said he told them. "If you do, you'll never have to work a day in your life because it will never seem like work to you."

Now Anderson focuses on happier times she shared with her son.

One of her favorite memories was the day she saw him riding his bicycle up the road with books in the basket headed to the library with Shep following behind. She said "Andy" grew up with the dog he received as a birthday present when he was 7.

Anderson said Shep always went with him to the barbershop, but she told him he couldn't take him to the library.

"Oh mother," she recalled him saying. "The librarian said that Shep is a very well mannered animal."

Anderson said the last time she saw her son and grandson was on Easter when they attended church and ate dinner together. She said his unexpected death is especially hard for his 13-year-old son, Tucker Brown, who lost his mother to cancer five months ago. Tucker will remain in Lake City with a family friend until school is out.

"Andy was just an all-around good kid, but every mom believes that her son is special," Anderson said. "He was the one that was always there. No matter when the chips fell, Andy was there to help pick them up."

"That's just the way he was," she said. He is also survived by his father, George A. Brown, Jr. and stepmother, Charley Brown, both of Port Orange; stepfather, Richard Anderson, Ocala; and sister, Connie Lee Whalen, Des Moines, Iowa.

A memorial service will be held today, at 1 p.m. at Christ Central Ministries Church, Lake City. In lieu of flowers, donations may be made in memory of Sgt. Brown to the Westview Boy's Home, P.O. Box 553, Hollis, Okla., 73550-0553, according to Gateway-Forest Lawn Funeral Home of Lake City.

Veteran FHP trooper killed in Columbia wreck

Published on Wednesday, April 28, 2004, in the Gainesville Sun

A veteran Florida Highway Patrol trooper who once described his Chevrolet Camaro patrol car as the "best thing they ever gave me" died Tuesday morning when his Camaro crashed into trees as he was preparing to stop a possible traffic violator.

Sgt. George A. "Andy" Brown III, 54, of Lake City was pronounced dead at the scene of the 10:05 a.m. crash on County Road 341 about 6 miles south of Lake City.

The father of a 13-year-old boy, Brown was a second-generation state trooper - the son of retired Trooper George A. Brown Jr. In addition to his patrol duties in the Camaro, Brown was a pilot who flew a plane for FHP out of the Lake City airport.

During a news conference outside the FHP building in Lake City, FHP Director Col. Christopher A. Knight said Brown was preparing to overtake a driver who apparently had committed a violation, but there was no pursuit under way when Brown's car left the two-lane, paved highway.

Troopers investigating the crash said Brown had turned on his blue lights when he got behind a small, dark car. In his final radio contact with FHP dispatchers, Brown said he was trying to overtake a vehicle but had not yet provided a license plate number or other identifying information, officials said.

Knight said both cars were southbound when Brown's car left the paved surface and moved onto the east shoulder. The Camaro rotated counterclockwise and then traveled into a wooded area near the shoulder and struck several trees.

Witnesses who saw the crash said they also saw the driver of the car that Brown was apparently preparing to pull over leave the area after the crash. A car matching the description was next seen several hours and several counties away.

At about 1:40 p.m. Tuesday, the Citrus County Sheriff's Office learned that the car was heading south on U.S. 19 from Levy County.

Gayle Tierney with the Citrus County Sheriff's Office said an agent with the Department of Agriculture reported he had spotted and was pursuing the suspect vehicle.

A Citrus County deputy joined the chase near the county line, Tierney said.

Officers followed the car, a dark-colored Neon, as it headed south into the Crystal River city limits.

Tierney said the car then turned east on State Road 44 and hit a car in the turning lane at County Road 486. The car in the turning lane was damaged, but no one was injured.

The suspect then reversed his car, hitting a Citrus County deputy's car behind him. The deputy sustained a non-life-threatening injury. The driver ran from his car and was stopped by two deputies using Tasers.

Tierney said speeds during the chase ranged from 50 to 80 mph and that officers were forced to take evasive action from the driver.

"He was driving out of control," she said.

Driver faces charges

The driver was identified as Greg Platt, 31, of Naples. He and a passenger in the car, Kelly Jean Smith, 25, of Naples, were taken into custody.

Charges in Citrus County could include leaving the scene of an accident, aggravated battery and fleeing and eluding, Tierney said. Platt also had a suspended license, and Smith was in possession of less than 20 grams of marijuana.

Platt has a prior criminal history including burglary, grand theft, robbery and aggravated battery, according to the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, and had been released from a state prison in 1999.

Troopers planned to conduct interviews with the pair in Citrus County, Tierney said.

The Florida Department of Law Enforcement was called in to assist in processing the crash scene, said Lt. Mike Burroughs, a spokesman for FHP. Burroughs said the Columbia County Sheriff's Office also is assisting in the investigation, which is being handled by FHP. Anyone with information about how the Neon was being driven before the crash is asked to call FHP toll-free at (800) 395-8248.

A tragic week

Brown's death was the third traffic-related fatality of an on-duty law enforcement officer in Florida in a week.

On Saturday, Hendry County Sheriff's Deputy Brian Andrew Haas, 21, was killed when his patrol car collided with a truck while he was responding to a call about a prowler.

On April 20, Hillsborough County Sheriff's Deputy David Abella, 26, was killed when he apparently lost control of his patrol car just before midnight. He was on his way to a call about a trespasser at a food store.

Brown's Camaro was not equipped with a video camera but did have a black box that monitored and recorded how the car was operating. Burroughs said the box was being sent to General Motors, where the information would be analyzed and reported back to FHP.

FHP officials are hoping to find out how fast the Camaro was driving.

"Speed was a factor," Knight said, but officials may not know for some time exactly what role speed played in the crash.

While the investigation continues into what happened and why, Knight said FHP officials and Brown's parents and son will be making funeral preparations for a man who has worked all over the state since first being hired on July 6, 1970. To honor the 38th Florida trooper ever killed in the line of duty, Gov. Jeb Bush ordered flags at all FHP buildings flown at half-staff until after Brown's funeral.

Long FHP career

A Marine Corps veteran, Brown had retired from FHP for seven months in 1996 after 25 years, but missed being a trooper so much that he called Knight from Texas to inquire about getting his job back and was rehired, Knight recalled Tuesday.

"He was always one of the hardest working troopers we had," Knight said. "He might be on his way to get the (FHP) plane to fly somewhere on an assignment, but if he saw a traffic violation, he would take time to pull over that driver."

Brown began his career with the FHP troop headquartered in Miami. He also worked for the troops headquartered in Orlando, Jacksonville and most recently Lake City. Knight said he got to know and like Brown when they were both stationed in Palatka, Knight as a captain and Brown as a pilot and trooper.

"He reported to me, and I saw that he was one of the top troopers in the state," Knight said.

Being assigned a Camaro instead of the standard-issue Crown Victoria is a reward given to the hardest working troopers - those who do the most enforcement work.

Brown was one of 200 of the 1,777 troopers to be issued a Camaro during the spring of 2002. The selected troopers were required to attend five hours of training to learn to handle the lighter, faster car as well as how to use its speed and brakes safely.

He told The Sun, "This is one of the perks of working for the state. And the image with these Camaros can be a deterrent for speeders."

A big advantage to the two-door cars is their ability to accelerate from a standstill to 100 mph in just less than 14 seconds, which is 10 seconds faster than the Crown Victorias. The Camaros also were attention-getters, something Brown told The Sun he enjoyed.

"This is the kind of car I like and a lot of the public likes, too. People wave at me when they see me in my Camaro," Brown said shortly after he was issued his car two years ago.

Witnesses place pair's car at scene of trooper's fatal crash Published on Thursday, April 29, 2004, in the Gainesville Sun

Two people inside a car that left the scene of a Florida Highway Patrol trooper's fatal crash were "whooping and hollering" as they drove away, witnesses have reported.

"While they fled away from the scene, they were kind of partying in the car, whooping and hollering, like they were celebrating," two Lake City employees working on the side of County Road 341 about a quarter of a mile south of the crash told investigators, according to FHP spokesman Lt. Mike Burroughs said.

Veteran trooper Sgt. George A. "Andy" Brown III, 54, of Lake City, died after his Chevrolet Camaro patrol car drove into trees about six miles south of Lake City shortly after 10 a.m.

Brown crashed as he tried to overtake a driver who apparently had committed a traffic violation, troopers said.

About four hours later, officers in Citrus County arrested Gregory Hampton Platt, 31, and Kelly Jean Smith, 25, both of Naples.

The dark-colored Neon that Platt was driving matched descriptions of the car involved in Brown's accident in Columbia County. Investigators had broadcast information about the vehicle to law enforcement agencies statewide after the accident.

Troopers believe Platt and Smith are the two who were in the car Brown had been following. But no charges had been filed as of Wednesday in connection with the Columbia County accident and they could not say why the couple were in the North Florida county.

Instead, the two were being held at the Citrus County jail on charges out of that county, most stemming from a chase that wound down at the county's western border and into Crystal River. Platt led officers down U.S. 19 and into the city, where he struck two cars, one a deputy's patrol car, the Citrus County Sheriff's Office reported. He ran from his car afterward and was stopped by two deputies using Tasers.

Platt, who has no bond, has been charged in Citrus County with aggravated battery with a deadly weapon on a law enforcement officer, fleeing and attempting to elude a police officer, resisting and obstructing an officer without violence, and driving with a suspended license.

Smith, who is being held on a \$10,000 bond, is charged with resisting an officer without violence and possession of less than 20 grams of marijuana.

Steve Zay with the Public Defender's Office said he had not received the files on Platt and Smith and could not comment.

Troopers do not know why Brown crashed or why he was following the other car, Burroughs said.

Brown called in to dispatchers three times during the incident, first at 10:08 a.m. advising troopers to contact the Columbia County Sheriff's Office about a Plymouth Neon fleeing from him, Burroughs said.

About 14 seconds later, Brown called in again to report his and the other car's location.

After a minute, Brown reported the Neon's driver was a white male with tatoos, Burroughs said.

A third witness, a female driver, told troopers she was driving along County Road 341, a two-lane road with a 45-mph speed limit, when she saw the Neon and Brown's Chevrolet Camaro patrol car. Both cars passed her and, shortly after, the Camaro crashed into the woods.

Initially, troopers reported the accident occurred at 10:05 a.m. but, based on Brown's calls, now say it took place closer to 10:09 a.m.

Investigators have no evidence of any contact between the two vehicles, Burroughs said.

An autopsy was conducted Wednesday in Jacksonville, FHP reported. Preliminary information from the autopsy did not offer any explanations for the crash.

Investigators also were trying to determine why Brown was following the car and how fast he was driving. On Tuesday, FHP Director Col. Christopher A. Knight had said speed was a factor but troopers did not know what role it played in the accident.

"We are even looking to see if Sgt. Brown had any contact with this car previously," Burroughs said. Officers were pulling tickets Brown had written and were checking with other law enforcement agencies.

Greg Taras, 45, Platt's former landlord in Naples, said he had rented a home to the pair about eight months ago.

"We had to kick them out, and the place was trashed," he said.

Taras accused his ex-tenants of being involved in the theft of tools and checks from his air-conditioning and appliance store next to their then-rented home.

"They were bad news. I'm not surprised they would run," Taras said.

Anyone with information about Platt's whereabouts before his arrest or why Brown was following the Neon is asked to call FHP toll-free at (800) 395-8248.

Fallen trooper formerly of Palatka

Published on Thursday, April 29, 2004, in the Palatka Daily News

On Tuesday, Sgt. George A. "Andy" Brown III, 55, of the Florida Highway Patrol received his last call in Lake City when his 2001 Chevy Camaro struck several trees on County Road 341 in Columbia County, killing the 33-year veteran.

As the story of his untimely death - caused while trying to overtake a Dodge Neon - played out across newspapers and televisions across the state, those who worked with him in Putnam County for many years remembered the "good guy" who served as a "Bear in the Air." Bear in the Air was a nickname given to FHP pilots for Putnam County's Troop G in the 1980s and '90s.

"He was my kind of trooper," Ret. Captain Herman Whaley said. "He was very dedicated. He loved to fly, he loved to patrol. He always wanted to help out. It's (Brown's death) really got me torn up."

Whaley served as supervisor over Brown on and off during his career throughout the state, beginning when Brown was a rookie in Miami in 1970.

"He was a big, tall, lanky boy," Whaley recalled of his first impression of Brown. Trooper Larry McKenzie remembered the perfectionist side of Brown when he came to Palatka, and the pride he took in representing the troop.

"He was the ideal trooper, the ideal sergeant," McKenzie said. "His cars were clean, his uniforms were clean. He shined the inside and outside of his car." McKenzie even recalled Brown using airplane wax on his FHP Mustang to make it shinier.

"He was proud of that thing," he said.

After beginning his career in Miami, Brown moved to Kissimmee, Bunnell and DeLand before being promoted to corporal in 1982 being assigned to Palatka as a law enforcement airplane pilot.

"He was an excellent pilot," Whaley said.

According to Whaley, as troop pilot, Brown would patrol up to a six-county radius, including I-95.

In 1983, Brown left Palatka and moved to Troop D, serving in both DeLand and Sanford. However, in 1985, Brown returned to Troop G, serving first in Jacksonville before transferring to Palatka in 1986. In 1995, Brown was promoted to sergeant, remaining in Palatka until his retirement on June 30, 1996. While in Palatka, Brown often acted as a Good Samaritan, according to Trooper Richard Hunter.

"Every Christmas he always gave money to a foster home with eight kids in order to give them a Christmas," Hunter said. "He never broadcasted it. He never let anyone know."

Hunter was notified of Brown's death while working patrol on Tuesday. "It hurt me at first," he said. "Someone told me at a rest area. But then things happen for a reason."

According to the FHP Web site, after his retirement Brown missed his interaction with citizens and visitors to the state of Florida and decided to return to patrol on April 1, 1997. Brown was reassigned to Lake City where he remained until his death on Tuesday.

Brown is the 38th Florida Highway Patrol Trooper to be killed in the line of duty. The last trooper death occurred in Hillsborough County in 1998 when Trooper Brad Crooks was shot and killed. The FHP said speed was a factor in Brown's crash, but gave few other details about the chase.

Officials believe a Naples couple was in the vehicle that Brown was trying to stop when he lost control of his patrol car and was killed. Gregory Hampton Platt, 31, and Kelly Jean Smith, 25, had not been charged as of Wednesday in Columbia County, where Brown died. But the pair was being held without bond about 60 miles to the south in Citrus County, charged with fleeing police there several hours after Brown's death, authorities said.

"I hate that he's gone. It's hard when someone like that dies. You keep looking for him," McKenzie said.

Brown was remembered in a moment of silence in the Senate on Wednesday. He is survived by a 13-year-old son, who had lost his mother six months earlier, said Sen. Nancy Argenziano, R-Dunnellon.

"We want to tell you how sorry we are for the loss in your family," she told troopers standing in the gallery above the chamber.

Citrus County Sheriff's deputies have arrested two people who may have been involved with the crash.

Florida trooper, a former area resident, dies in line of duty
Published on Thursday, April 29, 2004, in the Oil City Derrick, PA

An Oil City native working as a Florida Highway Patrol officer was killed Tuesday during an automobile chase in Columbia County, Fla.

The Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles said Sgt. George A. "Andy" Brown III, 55, was trying to overtake a violator around 10 a.m. Tuesday about six miles south of Lake City, Fla.

As both vehicles were traveling south, Brown's vehicle left the paved travel portion of the roadway and traveled onto the east shoulder, rotating counterclockwise. The vehicle then went into a wooded area where it hit several trees, the department said.

Brown was pronounced dead at the scene.

The son of George A. Brown II and Elizabeth Anderson Brown, he was born Oct. 27, 1948.

He enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps in 1967 and was honorably discharged as a lance corporal.

Brown started his career with the Florida Highway Patrol on July 6, 1970, becoming a second-generation trooper.

He was a member of the 37th Recruit Class, where he served as a platoon leader. His first duty assignment was Troop E in Miami. He also served in Kissimmee, Bunnell and Deland.

Brown was promoted June 15, 1982, to the rank of corporal and assigned to Troop G in Palatka as a law enforcement airplane pilot.

He retired from the patrol in Palatka on June 30, 1996, as a law enforcement sergeant.

After being retired for almost one year and missing serving the citizens and visitors of Florida, Brown reapplied for employment with the patrol. He was rehired April 1, 1997, as a sergeant, law enforcement airplane pilot and assigned to Troop B in Lake City.

He was a 1967 graduate of Titusville High School and is survived by one son, Tucker; his mother; his stepfather, Richard Anderson; his father; and one sister, Connie Whalen.

Brown is the 38th Florida state trooper killed in the line of duty.

Trooper killed in line of duty

Published on Thursday, April 29, 2004, in the Baker County Standard

A Florida Highway Patrol trooper was killed in the line of duty Tuesday morning pursuing a suspect vehicle in Columbia County. Veteran trooper Sergeant George A. "Andy" Brown, III, was pronounced dead at the scene.

Investigators say Trooper Brown was trying to overtake a vehicle for a traffic violation just after 10:00 am when he apparently lost control of his vehicle and slammed into a tree. The accident happened at County Road 242 and Sisters Welcome Road, about six miles southwest of Lake City.

Sergeant Brown's vehicle left the paved travel portion of the roadway onto the east shoulder, rotating counterclockwise and hitting several trees as it entered the woods.

A statewide bulletin for a black Dodge Neon with dark-tinted windows, driven by a white male with multiple tattoos and a white female passenger was issued by FHP. That afternoon authorities in Citrus County detained a vehicle with two occupants who matched that description. They are being questioned at this time.

Tuesday afternoon, Sergeant Brown was given a uniformed escort eastbound on Interstate 10 to Jacksonville. Officers from area agencies, including Baker County paid tribute to Brown as the cortege passed through each county.

Sergeant Brown started his career with the Patrol on July 6, 1970 as a member of the 37th Recruit Class. His first duty assignment was Troop E in Miami. He also served in Troops D and G in Jacksonville. His current assignment was Troop B Lake City where he served as a Law Enforcement Airplane Pilot.

Brown retired from the FHP in 1996 after 25 years service, then rejoined in 1997. He was a 33-year-veteran of the Florida Highway Patrol. Brown became the 38th State Trooper to be killed in the line of duty. Sergeant Brown was a second generation trooper. His father is a retired State Trooper. Brown is survived by his 13-year-old son, his mother, father and sister.

FHP trooper dies in wreck

Published on Wednesday, April 28, 2004, in the Lake City Reporter

The Lake City-based Florida Highway Patrol Troop B lost one of its own Tuesday when a trooper was killed in a fatal wreck after chasing another vehicle.

"It's a sad day for the FHP," said Col. Chris Knight, director of the agency.

Knight identified the dead trooper as Sgt. George "Andy" Brown, 55, a 33-year veteran of the FHP and Lake City resident. Brown's death occurred shortly after 10 a.m. Tuesday.

Brown is survived by a 13-year-old son, his mother, father and a sister. His father, George A. Brown Jr., was also a career FHP trooper.

According to Knight, Brown was attempting to overtake and pull over a dark-colored Plymouth Neon on Sisters Welcome Road near County Road 242 in Columbia County for an unspecified violation.

Knight said Brown's vehicle, a 2001 FHP Chevrolet Camaro, went off the east shoulder of Sisters Welcome Road. Brown lost control and began to spin counter-clockwise, entering the woods off the roadway and striking several trees.

The patrolman was pronounced dead at the scene. Knight said damage to the vehicle was severe and that speed would be a factor in contributing to his death.

Brown was the 38th FHP trooper killed in the line of duty and the agency's first death since 1998, when a Troop C patrolman was shot and killed while on duty in Tampa.

Following a "be on the lookout" notice put out to law enforcement statewide for the Neon, Knight said a white male driver and female passenger were taken into custody in Citrus County by its sheriff's office after a brief pursuit.

Knight said the driver and passenger of the Neon were being questioned by the FHP Tuesday afternoon and no charges had been filed. He said his agency would conduct a preliminary investigation, interview the vehicle's occupants and work with the State Attorney's Office.

Shortly after the wreck, the Lake City Police Department, Columbia County Sheriff's Office and FHP closed a 1/2-mile stretch of Sisters Welcome Road from Kicklighter Terrace to C.R. 242.

On the north end, a sheriff's deputy turned away a constant stream of motorists, many with questions about why they couldn't get through and what had happened. The road remained closed through the afternoon.

George Skinner, county commissioner and co-owner of Plaza Barbers, went out to the scene of the wreck shortly after it happened.

"I'm devastated," he said. "He was a personal friend of mine. I just cut his hair last Saturday. I'm going to sorely miss him. My spirit is sorely wounded."

Both the FHP and Skinner had nothing but praise for Brown, a second generation trooper, who first started with the agency on July, 6 1970.

"His services were exemplary," Skinner said. "He was a trooper's trooper. He gave 110 percent in whatever he did."

Knight was joined at the Lake City FHP office by nine other troopers from both Troop B and around the state.

"Not only in Lake City, he was one of the top troopers in the state," he responded to a reporter's question on Brown's service. "Andy was a worker."

In addition to his duties as a trooper, Brown was Troop B's "Bear in the Air," flying an FHP plane stationed at Lake City Municipal Airport over local highways to help curb speeding in the area.

"He truly had the safety of the public at heart," said Lt. Mike Burroughs, Troop B public information officer. "He truly believed in enforcing traffic laws."

Burroughs said Brown was a "very professional, motivated, detail-oriented trooper," who loved his job so much he rejoined the agency in 1997 after retiring the year before.

"He tried retirement and he didn't like it, so he came back with us," Burroughs said.

Brown was known among Troop B for both his high activity level and how well-groomed he kept himself and his FHP vehicle, according to Burroughs.

Last year, a memorial monument for all of Columbia County's fallen public safety officers was erected after Sheriff's Office deputy Jeff Davis died as a result of injuries sustained in an on-duty wreck in 2002.

"We just have to add another name," Skinner said, his voice trailing off.

Andy Brown had previously served for FHP troops E, D and G.

FHP looking into wreck's cause

Published on Thursday, April 29, 2004, in the Lake City Reporter

On Wednesday, the Florida Highway Patrol continued to interview the driver and passenger of a vehicle it believes Sgt. George "Andy" Brown III, 55, began pursuing minutes before dying in a Tuesday wreck. No charges have been filed in the incident as yet.

"There is kind of a missing piece of the puzzle," said Lt. Mike Burroughs, FHP Troop B public information officer. "We wouldn't want to jump out too early and start making any type of assumption on charges. We still do not know what the initial violation was that brought Sgt. Brown's attention to them."

He said there will be charges, but they are to follow a "methodical, tedious" investigation, building a firm case for submittal to the State Attorney's Office.

Burroughs said driver Greg Hampton Platt, 31, and passenger Kelly Jean Smith, 25, both of Naples, are believed to be the occupants of a 1998 Plymouth Neon traveling on Sisters Welcome Road at about 10:05 a.m. when Brown attempted to pull the vehicle over in his marked FHP 2001 Chevrolet Camaro.

Brown's body was transported back to Lake City Wednesday by FHP escorts from the Medical Examiner's office in Jacksonville to Gateway Memorial Funeral Home.

He is survived by his mother, father, sister and a 13-year-old son. About six months ago, Burroughs said the boy's mother died from terminal lung cancer.

"The FHP is a very, very tight family," he said. "We have been known to draw strength from within ... normally we'll pull together from within as a team and get through it. But our heart and sympathies go out to the family most of all, especially to know that a 13-year-old has lost both his mother and his father in a span of less than six months."

When attempting to "overtake" the Neon, the FHP said Brown went off the road's east shoulder, lost control and began to spin counter-clockwise. Brown's vehicle then struck several trees in a wooded area on the road side, severely damaging his vehicle.

He was pronounced dead at the scene, the 38th FHP trooper to die in the line of duty since it began keeping records in 1941 and the agency's first since 1998.

Platt and Smith were ordered held without bond following an initial court appearance Wednesday in Citrus County, where they were arrested several hours after Brown's death Tuesday in a brief pursuit by sheriff's deputies.

They were stopped in Crystal River when the Neon struck the rear of a Toyota Camry on State Road 44. Placing the car in reverse, Platt then struck the front end of Citrus County Sheriff Deputy Matt Taylor's patrol car.

Platt fled the car and was captured by deputies using Tasers. Smith was arrested in the Neon.

Taylor was taken to a nearby hospital for a shoulder injury and no one else was injured.

Citrus County charges against Platt include leaving the scene of an accident, aggravated battery, fleeing and eluding, as well as driving with a suspended license. Smith was arrested for possession of cocaine and resisting an officer without violence, according to the arrest affidavit.

According to Florida Department of Law Enforcement records, Platt has a prior criminal history including burglary, grand theft, robbery and aggravated battery. He was released from prison in 1999.

But what Platt and Smith may have been doing in Lake City and where on Sisters Welcome Brown saw a violation and began to go after the Neon is unknown, Burroughs said.

He said the agency is asking anyone in the area of C.R. 341 or the nearby intersection of Bascom Norris Drive from about 10-10:10 a.m. Tuesday who may have any information on Platt's vehicle to contact the FHP at 758-0515. Burroughs said if anyone saw the vehicle anywhere in town before that time or has information on what Platt and Smith may have been doing in the area, their information could help the FHP investigation.

"We are asking the public's help in that regard," he said.

There are currently three witnesses who've come forward who were on Sisters Welcome when the wreck occurred Tuesday and were passed by the purple Neon, Burroughs said.

A quarter mile south from where Brown wrecked, he said two city workers were on the shoulder of the road when the Neon passed with a white male and white female passenger.

"They said they could see the driver and the passenger and said what they heard," Burroughs said. "They heard whooping and hollering as though they were celebrating inside the car."

Another motorist was passed by the Neon and noticed plastic was covering a missing rear window and the white male driver.

Burroughs said he currently believes the Neon was going south on Sisters Welcome and Brown was driving north. He said Brown may have noticed a violation, made a U-turn and began to pursue the vehicle.

Platt and Smith were caught after a statewide "be on the lookout" notice led to a chase in Levy County by Florida Department of Agriculture Law Enforcement Officer Wade Merritt.

Burroughs said Merritt reported speeds more than 100 mph while pursuing Platt and turned pursuit over to Citrus County when the Neon entered its jurisdiction.

He said the teamwork was helped by the FHP's 800 MHz radio system that allowed Sgt. Trampas Bishop of Troop B, who responded to Brown's wreck first, to talk to witnesses and immediately send out a description of the Neon to other agencies.

At the Lake City FHP offices, the mood was somber and saddened Wednesday, Burroughs said. Having a possible suspect in custody does make it "somewhat easier to deal with," he said.

But the Troop's focus is now on helping the family and seeing to their needs, Burroughs added.

Florida Highway Patrol trooper dies at start of multi-county chase Published on Wednesday, April 28, 2004, in the Citrus County Chronicle

LAKE CITY - A veteran Florida Highway Patrol trooper who once described his Chevrolet Camaro patrol car as the "best thing they ever gave me," died Tuesday morning when his Camaro crashed into trees as he was preparing to stop a possible traffic violator.

Sgt. George A. "Andy" Brown III, 54, was pronounced dead at the scene of the 10:05 a.m. crash on County Road 341 about six miles south of Lake City. The father of a 13-year-old boy, Brown was a second generation state trooper - the son of retired Trooper George A. Brown Jr. In addition to his patrol duties in the Camaro, Brown was a pilot who flew a plane for FHP out of the Lake City airport.

During a news conference outside the FHP building in Lake City where Brown frequently reported for duty, FHP Director Col. Christopher A. Knight said Brown was preparing to overtake a driver who had apparently committed a violation, but there was no pursuit under way when Brown's car left the two-lane, paved highway.

Knight said both cars were southbound when Brown's car left the paved surface and moved onto the east shoulder. The Camaro rotated counterclockwise and then traveled into a wooded area near the shoulder where it struck several trees.

The driver of the car that Brown was apparently preparing to pull over left the area. It was not known Tuesday if that driver knew Brown had crashed. A car matching the description was next seen several hours later and several counties away.

At about 1:40 p.m. Tuesday, the Citrus County Sheriff's Office learned that the car was heading south on U.S. 19 from Levy County.

Gail Tierney with the Citrus County Sheriff's Office said an agent with the Department of Agriculture reported he had spotted and was pursuing the suspect vehicle.

A Citrus County deputy joined the chase near the county line, Tierney said.

Officers followed the car, a dark-colored Neon, as it headed south into the Crystal River city limits.

Tierney said the car then turned east on State Road 44 and hit a car in the turning lane at County Road 486. The car in the turning lane was damaged, but no one was injured.

The suspect then reversed his car, hitting a Citrus County deputy's car behind him. The deputy sustained a non-life threatening injury. The driver ran from his car and was stopped by two deputies using tasers.

The driver was identified as Greg Platt, 31, of Naples. He and a passenger in the car, Kelly Jean Smith, 25, of Naples, were taken into custody. Charges in Citrus County could include leaving the scene of an accident, aggravated battery and fleeing and eluding, Tierney said. Platt also had a suspended license, and Smith was in possession of less than 20 grams of marijuana.

Platt has a prior criminal history including burglary, grand theft, robbery and aggravated battery, according to the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, and had been released from a state prison in 1999. Troopers planned to conduct interviews with the pair in Citrus County, Tierney said.

The Florida Department of Law Enforcement was called in to assist in processing the crash scene, according to Lt. Mike Burroughs, a spokesman for FHP. Burroughs said the Columbia County Sheriff's Office is also assisting in the investigation, which is being handled by FHP. Burroughs said FHP is still trying to figure out why Brown was going after the Neon.

While the investigation continues into what happened and why, Knight said FHP officials and Brown's parents and son will be making funeral preparations for a man who has worked all over the state since first being hired on July 6, 1970. To honor the 38th Florida trooper ever killed in the line of duty, Gov. Jeb Bush ordered flags at all FHP buildings flown at half staff until after Brown's funeral.

A Marine Corps veteran, Brown had retired from FHP for seven months in 1996 after 25 years, but missed being a trooper so much that he called Knight from Texas to inquire about getting his job back and was re-hired, Knight recalled Tuesday.

"He was always one of the hardest working troopers we had," Knight said. "He might be on his way to get the (FHP) plane to fly somewhere on an assignment, but if he saw a traffic violation, he would take time to pull over that driver."

Brown began his career with the FHP troop headquartered in Miami. He also worked for the troops headquartered in Orlando, Jacksonville and most recently Lake City. Knight said he got to know and like Brown when they were both stationed in Palatka, Knight as a captain and Brown as a pilot and trooper.

"He reported to me and I saw that he was one of the top troopers in the state," Knight said.

Being assigned a Camaro instead of the standard issue Crown Victoria is a reward given to the hardest working troopers ? those who do the most enforcement work.

Brown was one of 200 of the 1,777 troopers to be issued a Camaro during the spring of 2002. The selected troopers were required to attend five hours of training to learn to handle the lighter, faster car as well as how to use its speed and brakes safely.

He told The Sun "This is one of the perks of working for the state and the image with these Camaros can be a deterrent for speeders.

A big advantage to the two-door cars is their ability to accelerate from a standstill to 100 mph in just under 14 seconds, which is 10 seconds faster than the Crown Victorias. The Camaros were also attention getters, something Brown told The Sun he enjoyed.

"This is the kind of car I like and a lot of the public likes, too.

People wave at me when they see me in my Camaro," Brown said shortly after he was issued his car two years ago.

Police look at trooper's death

Published on Thursday, April 29, 2004, in the Citrus County Chronicle

Authorities are continuing to investigate a Tuesday morning crash in Columbia County that claimed the life of George A. "Andy" Brown III, a sergeant with the Florida Highway Patrol.

A Naples couple is being held without bond in Citrus County for questioning in connection with the crash.

Brown, 54, was about six miles south of Lake City when the crash occurred.

Witnesses at the scene provided a description of the vehicle Brown was attempting to pursue when he crashed, and they told investigators the vehicle left the scene of the crash.

Gregory Hampton Platt, 31, of Naples, remained in custody Wednesday at the Citrus County Detention Facility in Lecanto where he was arrested following a two-county chase that ended near the intersection of State Road 44 and County Road 486, east of Crystal River.

Shortly before 2 p.m., a Department of Agriculture law enforcement officer on patrol in Levy County spotted a car matching the description mentioned earlier in a statewide bulletin and gave chase.

Deputies from the Citrus County Sheriff's Office joined the chase near the Cross-Florida Barge Canal Bridge on U.S. 19.

The chase ended a short time later when Platt crashed into another vehicle east of Crystal River, and then rammed a patrol car that had pulled in behind him, injuring a deputy, authorities said.

Platt exited his vehicle and ran toward the Fraternal Order of Eagles Aerie building where a witness attempted to grab him. Platt confronted deputies and told them to shoot him, according to his arrest report.

When Platt failed to lie on the ground as ordered, deputies fired two taser guns simultaneously to subdue him.

While Platt has not been charged in connection with the crash that killed Brown, he was charged for infractions he reportedly committed during the chase. Those charges include aggravated battery on a law enforcement officer, attempting to flee or elude an officer and driving with a suspended license.

Platt has a lengthy criminal history that includes arrests on charges of burglary, grand theft, robbery and aggravated battery.

He was released from prison in 1999.

His passenger, Kelly Jean Smith, 25, of Naples, was charged with resisting an officer without violence and possession of less than 20 grams of marijuana.

FHP spokesman Larry Coggins Jr. said the agency is continuing to investigate what caused Brown to lose control of his department-issued 2001 Chevrolet Camaro patrol car.

Coggins said investigators with the FHP and the Florida Department of Law Enforcement plan to question Platt and Smith in more detail.

He said any charges against Platt are pending the outcome of that investigation.

As for the injured deputy, Sheriff's spokeswoman Gail Tierney said Deputy Matt Taylor was treated and released at Citrus Memorial Hospital in Inverness after sustaining a right shoulder injury.

"He's doing fine," she said, adding that he's expected back on duty Saturday.

Tierney added that the FHP would handle all aspects of the investigation, which includes issuing a crash report of the incident that occurred in Citrus County.

Naples couple held after crash that killed trooper
Published on Tuesday, April 27, 2004, in the Ft. Myers News-Press

LAKE CITY — Officials believe a Naples couple was in the car that Florida Highway Patrol Sgt. George "Andy" Brown III was trying to stop when he lost control of his patrol car and was killed.

Gregory Hampton Platt, 31, and Kelly Jean Smith, 25, had not yet been charged Wednesday in Columbia County where Brown was killed Tuesday, but they were charged in Citrus County with crimes allegedly committed while fleeing police there several hours after Brown's death.

After an initial court appearance Wednesday in Citrus County, Platt and Smith were ordered held without bond. Steve Zay with the Public Defender's Office said they had not received the files on Platt and Smith and could not comment.

Citrus County charges against Platt include leaving the scene of an accident, aggravated battery and fleeing and eluding. Platt also had a suspended license. Smith was arrested for possession of cocaine and resisting an officer without violence, according to their arrest affidavits.

According to the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, Platt has a prior criminal history including burglary, grand theft, robbery and aggravated battery. He was released from prison in 1999.

Brown was pursuing a traffic violator on Columbia County Road 341 when his 2001 Chevrolet Camaro spun off the road and struck several trees six miles south of Lake City, said Florida Highway Patrol spokesman Lt. Mike Burroughs. The FHP said speed was a factor in the crash, but gave few other details about the chase.

Witnesses said they saw the car Brown was attempting to stop leave the area after the accident. A car matching the description was seen several hours and several counties away.

A Citrus County Sheriff's Office deputy followed the car, a dark-colored Neon, as it headed into the Crystal River city limits.

Gail Tierney with the Sheriff's Office said the car turned east on State Road 44 and hit a car in the turning lane. The car in the turning lane was damaged, but no one was injured.

Platt then reversed his car, hitting a deputy's car behind him and then ran from his car. He was stopped two deputies using Tasers. Smith, a passenger, was arrested by officers in the car.

Brown, 54, had been a second-generation trooper since July 1970, following in his father's footsteps. Brown doubled as a "Bear in the Air," the nickname given to troopers who also pilot FHP spotter aircraft.

He retired in 1996 after a career that saw assignments in southeast and in northeast Florida, but returned to the force after a year off and was stationed in Lake City.

"He truly had the safety of the public at heart," Burroughs said. "He truly believed in enforcing traffic laws."

He was the first FHP trooper to die in the line of duty since Brad Crooks was shot and killed in Hillsborough County in 1998.

Brown, who had a 13-year-old son, also was the 38th trooper to die in Florida since the FHP started keeping records in 1941. Seventeen of those were shot, 15 died in auto crashes, five died in plane crashes and one died in an explosion.

FOLLOW: Couple held in Citrus County after FHP trooper's death
Published on Wednesday, April 28, 2004, in the Sarasota Herald-Tribune

LAKE CITY -- Officials believe a Naples couple was in the car that Florida Highway Patrol Sgt. George "Andy" Brown III was trying to stop when he lost control of his patrol car and was killed.

Gregory Hampton Platt, 31, and Kelly Jean Smith, 25, had not yet been charged Wednesday in Columbia County where Brown was killed Tuesday, but they have been charged in Citrus County with crimes allegedly committed while fleeing police there several hours after Brown's death.

After an initial court appearance Wednesday in Citrus County, Platt and Smith were ordered held without bond. Steve Zay with the Public Defender's Office said they had not received the files on Platt and Smith and could not comment.

Citrus County charges against Platt include leaving the scene of an accident, aggravated battery and fleeing and eluding. Platt also had a suspended license. Smith was arrested for possession of cocaine and resisting an officer without violence, according to their arrest affidavits.

According to the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, Platt has a prior criminal history including burglary, grand theft, robbery and aggravated battery. He was released from prison in 1999.

Brown was pursuing a traffic violator on Columbia County Road 341 when his 2001 Chevrolet Camaro spun off the road and struck several trees six miles south of Lake City, said Florida Highway Patrol spokesman Lt. Mike Burroughs. The FHP said speed was a factor in the crash, but gave few other details about the chase.

Burroughs said Wednesday that traffic homicide investigators were working to link the Naples couple back to the Lake City area.

Three witnesses gave officers a description of the car driven by Platt, a purple Dodge Neon, with the back window missing.

Prosecutors for the two counties were also conferring about possible charges, he said.

Burroughs said the first officer on the scene put out an alert on the car, allowing officers to spot the couple several hours and several counties away.

A Citrus County Sheriff's Office deputy followed the car as it headed into the Crystal River city limits.

Gail Tierney with the Sheriff's Office said the car turned east on State Road 44 and hit a car in the turning lane. The car in the turning lane was damaged, but no one was injured.

Platt then reversed his car, hitting a deputy's car behind him and then ran from his car. He was stopped two deputies using Tasers. Smith, a passenger, was arrested by officers in the car.

Brown, 54, had been a second-generation trooper since July 1970, following in his father's footsteps. Brown doubled as a "Bear in the Air," the nickname given to troopers who also pilot FHP spotter aircraft.

He retired in 1996 after a career that saw assignments in southeast and in northeast Florida, but returned to the force after a year off and was stationed in Lake City.

"He truly had the safety of the public at heart," Burroughs said. "He truly believed in enforcing traffic laws."

He was the first FHP trooper to die in the line of duty since Brad Crooks was shot and killed in Hillsborough County in 1998.

Brown, who had a 13-year-old son, also was the 38th trooper to die in Florida since the FHP started keeping records in 1941. Seventeen of those were shot, 15 died in auto crashes, five died in plane crashes and one died in an explosion.

**Naples couple held in Citrus County for allegedly fleeing trooper
Published on Thursday, April 29, 2004, in the Naples Daily News**

LAKE CITY — Officials believe a Naples couple was in the vehicle that Florida Highway Patrol Sgt. George "Andy" Brown III was trying to stop when he lost control of his patrol car and was killed.

Gregory Hampton Platt, 31, and Kelly Jean Smith, 25, had not been charged as of Wednesday in Columbia County, where Brown died.

But the pair was being held without bond about 60 miles to the south in Citrus County, charged with fleeing police there several hours after Brown's death, authorities said.

Brown, 54, was pursuing a traffic violator on Columbia County Road 341 on Tuesday when his 2001 Chevrolet Camaro spun off the road and struck several trees six miles south of Lake City, Florida Highway Patrol spokesman Lt. Mike Burroughs said Wednesday.

Brown was the first FHP trooper to die in the line of duty since Brad Crooks was shot and killed in Hillsborough County in 1998.

The FHP said speed was a factor in Brown's crash, but gave few other details about the chase.

After the crash, three witnesses gave officers a description of the car driven by Platt, a purple Dodge Neon, with the back window missing. Officers spotted the vehicle several hours later in Crystal River in Citrus County, Burroughs said.

When deputies stopped the car, Platt tried to run, but he was quickly arrested, said Gail Tierney, spokeswoman with the Citrus sheriff's office. Smith was arrested in the car.

Citrus County charges against Platt include leaving the scene of an accident, aggravated battery and fleeing and eluding. Smith was arrested for possession of cocaine and resisting an officer without violence. The public defender's office declined comment on their cases.

Platt, who lists an address of 110 Rose Blvd., North Naples, has a lengthy criminal history, including six pending felony charges in Collier County Circuit Court.

Platt was released from the Collier County jail on March 16 on a \$60,000 bond for three counts of burglary of a dwelling and three counts of grand theft, according to Naples Assistant State Attorney Dave Scuderi and Collier County Sheriff's Office records.

In each case, Platt broke into and stole from unoccupied residences in Golden Gate Estates, according to court records. He was arrested May 16, 2003.

Platt served seven years in state prison between 1992 and 1999 for a robbery in Collier County and on charges in Lee County of robbery with a firearm, aggravated battery with a deadly weapon and four counts of kidnapping.

Court records also show Platt has been arrested on 10 other felony counts, most of which deal with drug possession and grand theft, and on 24 misdemeanors, ranging from domestic violence battery to possession of drug paraphernalia. He has been placed on probation at least three times, court records show.

Smith, who lists 210 Rose Blvd. as her address, also has a history of arrests. However, all 10 felony charges of dealing in stolen property and giving false information on pawned items were dropped by state prosecutors after her arrest.

Smith pleaded no contest in 2003 to a misdemeanor, possession of drug paraphernalia, court records show. She paid \$161 in court-related costs.

Brown, however, had been a trooper since July 1970, following in his father's footsteps. Brown doubled as a "Bear in the Air," the nickname given to troopers who also pilot FHP spotter aircraft.

He retired in 1996 after a career that saw assignments in southeast and in northeast Florida, but returned to the force after a year off and was stationed in Lake City.

"He truly had the safety of the public at heart," Burroughs said. "He truly believed in enforcing traffic laws."

Brown, who had a 13-year-old son, also was the 38th trooper to die in Florida since the FHP started keeping records in 1941. Seventeen of those were shot, 15 died in auto crashes, five died in plane crashes and one died in an explosion.

Investigation filling in chase's blanks

Published on Thursday, April 29, 2004, in the St. Petersburg Times

CRYSTAL RIVER - The Florida Highway Patrol on Wednesday said it was "99.9 percent sure" that the vehicle involved in a high-speed chase that ended in Citrus County was the one a Florida Highway Patrol trooper had been trying to stop Tuesday morning in Columbia County.

The trooper, Sgt. George A. "Andy" Brown III, died while trying to stop a vehicle for speeding. Hours later, after leading authorities on a chase through two counties, Gregory Hampton Platt was stopped and arrested just east of Crystal River.

"We are 99.9 percent sure that that's it, but we will not say that conclusively until we have linked it back through the investigative process," said FHP spokesman Lt. Mike Burroughs.

Platt and his passenger, Kelly Jean Smith, remained at the Citrus County jail Wednesday, held on a variety of charges. Both are from Naples.

On Tuesday, three witnesses provided authorities with descriptions of the car the trooper had been trying to stop, as well as descriptions of the driver and passenger, Burroughs said.

Their information led FHP to issue a statewide bulletin that alerted Florida law enforcement agencies to look out for a dark Dodge Neon with plastic in the back window, possibly driven by a white male with numerous tattoos with a white female passenger.

The driver and passenger were heard "whooping and hollering" after the trooper crashed, as if they were celebrating, according to Burroughs.

Burroughs said FHP traffic homicide investigators would be questioning the two suspects. "We're going to have to piece it all together," he said.

The Florida Department of Law Enforcement is assisting FHP with its investigation. The Camaro driven by Brown, 54, will be analyzed in a Tallahassee lab, FDLE spokesman Rick Morera said.

FHP also is investigating the crash that ended the chase. The wreck was at State Road 44 and County Road 486.

Platt, 31, has been charged by the Citrus County Sheriff's Office with two counts of aggravated battery with a deadly weapon on a law enforcement officer, as well as one count each of fleeing and eluding a police officer, resisting or obstructing an officer without violence and driving with a suspended license, according to an arrest report. On Wednesday, he was being held without bail.

The Sheriff's Office charged Smith, 25, with resisting or obstructing an officer without violence and possessing 20 grams or less of marijuana, another arrest report said. She also remained at the jail Wednesday. Her bail was set at \$10,000.

Both Platt and Smith have been arrested before, FDLE reports show. Platt's arrests date back to 1991, and include charges from the Collier County Sheriff's Office of aggravated assault, burglary, larceny, robbery, marijuana possession, battery and fraud. The Fort Myers Police Department charged him with weapon possession, robbery, kidnapping and aggravated battery.

Smith previously had been arrested by the Collier County Sheriff's Office on charges of dealing in stolen property and fraud, and by the Naples Police Department on a charge of narcotic equipment possession, according to an FDLE report.

Crystal River interim police Chief Gordon Rowland said his department is considering more charges against Platt. Authorities said it appeared that Platt intentionally tried to collide with two Crystal River patrol cars on U.S. 19 just north of SR 44. Sheriff's spokeswoman Gail Tierney said the Neon also seemed to have tried to strike a deputy's car during the pursuit.

Tuesday's events started just after 10 a.m., when Brown tried to stop a speeder on Columbia County Road 341, approximately 6 miles south of Lake City, FHP said.

According to authorities, this is what happened:

Both cars went south on CR 341, but Brown's patrol car went off the road, onto a shoulder, spun, veered into woods and struck several trees. The FHP veteran was pronounced dead at the scene.

Later Tuesday morning, officer Wade Merritt of the Office of Agricultural Law Enforcement heard the FHP's bulletin and thought he spotted the Neon as he was on patrol on U.S. 19, which runs through the Goethe State Forest in Levy County. He started to trail the car and notified the Levy County Sheriff's Office.

Despite Merritt's lights and sirens, the Neon sped away. At times, the chase reached 100 mph, about as fast as Merritt's Chevy Blazer goes, said Dale Marshall, who works with Merritt.

Citrus County sheriff's deputies, with Crystal River police officers following, took over when the pursuit crossed the county line.

The Neon sped south on U.S. 19, continued on W Power Line Street, returned to U.S. 19, then headed east on SR 44.

Just before reaching CR 486, the Neon struck the rear of a Toyota Camry, which was going to turn left, then went in reverse and struck the front end of a sheriff's vehicle.

Then Platt got out of the car and ran toward the northwest corner of the intersection. Officer Merritt had his gun drawn, but two sheriff's deputies using Tasers stopped Platt. Smith did not leave the car.

Deputy Matt Taylor suffered minor injuries to his right shoulder from the crash. He was taken to Citrus Memorial Hospital, where he was treated and released, Tierney said.

The crash scene at one of the county's busiest intersections stalled traffic for hours and for miles on SR 44, CR 486 and U.S. 19.

Several law enforcement officers from various agencies were on hand directing traffic and gathering information, including a pair from the Office of Agricultural Law Enforcement, a division within the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services; at least a dozen from the Sheriff's Office; and about a dozen FHP troopers. Assistant State Attorney Bill Catto also was at the scene Tuesday afternoon.

The FHP group at the scene included a couple of troopers from Brown's troop and three supervisors, said FHP spokesman Larry Coggins. He said so many troopers turned up because of the Neon's possible involvement in their fellow trooper's fatal crash.

Following Brown's death, Gov. Jeb Bush has ordered that flags at all FHP buildings hang at half-staff.

And when the state Senate opened its session Wednesday, Sen. Nancy Argenziano, R-Dunnellon, asked her colleagues to take a moment to recognize Brown for his service.

"Yesterday was a sad day in Florida," she said.

Argenziano described the circumstances of Brown's death, and talked about his long career which included coming out of retirement to return to the Florida Highway Patrol. "He dedicated his career to law enforcement."

Argenziano also recognized four troopers sitting in the gallery to senators' applause. Senate President Jim King, R-Jacksonville, asked for a moment of silence.

Crash leads to chase, arrest

Published on Wednesday, April 28, 2004, in the St. Petersburg Times

CRYSTAL RIVER - The driver of a car suspected of involvement in a crash that killed a Florida Highway Patrol trooper in Columbia County was arrested Tuesday after a two-county chase that ended in a wreck east of Crystal River.

Citrus County sheriff's officials held Gregory Hampton Platt, 31, of Naples on charges of driving with a suspended license, fleeing and eluding a police officer, resisting or obstructing an officer without violence, and aggravated battery with a deadly weapon on a law enforcement officer, according to an arrest report.

Platt's passenger, Kelly Jean Smith, 25, also of Naples, was charged with possessing 20 grams or less of marijuana, the arrest report said.

The report also showed she was charged with resisting or obstructing an officer without violence.

The highway patrol is investigating the crash that killed Sgt. George A. "Andy" Brown III, 54, and is trying to determine the role of the vehicle Platt drove, a dark Plymouth Neon coup, patrol spokesman Larry Coggins said.

Coggins said troopers interviewed Platt and Smith after they were taken into custody at the Citrus County Sheriff's Office.

The series of incidents began about 10 a.m. Tuesday as Brown tried to stop a speeder on County Road 341 in Columbia County, about 6 miles south of Lake City, according to FHP.

As both cars traveled south on CR 341, Brown's 2002 Camaro went off the road and onto the shoulder, rotated counter-clockwise and then veered into woods, striking several trees.

He was found dead in his patrol car, Coggins said.

Brown's last radio transmission was to troopers in Lake City. He gave a detailed description of the car, driver and passenger he was trying to stop.

Later Tuesday morning, officer Wade Merritt of the Office of Agricultural Law Enforcement, a division of the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, heard the statewide bulletin that had been issued for the vehicle suspected of involvement in the fatal crash.

Merritt, on patrol in Levy County, called the Levy County Sheriff's Office to report he thought he was behind the vehicle the FHP was seeking. He asked for backup.

Traveling south on U.S. 19, the officer activated his lights and sirens, but the car sped off. At times, authorities said, the officer drove up to 100 mph.

When the pursuit crossed into Citrus County, Citrus deputies took over. They were assisted by Crystal River police, said sheriff's spokeswoman Gail Tierney.

The chase continued on W Power Line Street, then returned to U.S. 19, then proceeded east onto State Road 44.

At SR 44 and Citrus County Road 486, the Neon struck the rear of a Toyota Camry, then went in reverse and struck the front end of a Citrus sheriff's vehicle.

Deputy Matt Taylor, 37, was transported to Citrus Memorial Hospital with a shoulder injury, Tierney said.

Afterward, Platt got out of the car and ran toward the northwest corner of the intersection. He was apprehended by three officers.

Tierney said Smith did not leave the car.

REMEMBRANCES

Fallen trooper remembered:

Published on Thursday, April 29, 2004, in the Tallahassee Democrat

A Florida Highway Patrol Trooper killed in the line of duty earlier this week was remembered in a moment of silence in the Senate on Wednesday. Sgt. Andy Brown, 54, was pursuing a traffic violator when his 2001 Chevrolet Camaro spun off the road and struck several trees Tuesday, according to the Highway Patrol. He was the first FHP trooper to die in the line of duty since 1998. Brown, a second-generation trooper and Marine Corps veteran, joined the patrol in July 1970. He retired in 1996, only to return to the force a year later. He is survived by a 13-year-old son, who had lost his mother six months earlier, said Sen. Nancy Argenziano, R-Dunnellon. Citrus County Sheriff's deputies have arrested two people who may have been involved with the crash.

Trooper killed in car chase; detectives find possible clue

Published on Thursday, April 29, 2004, in the Miami Herald

A well-liked North Florida trooper who once served in Miami becomes the 38th FHP officer to be killed in the line of duty after a fatal car accident.

Florida Highway Patrol homicide investigators spent Wednesday in Crystal River trying to determine whether a car that police are holding there is the one that an FHP trooper was trying to catch when his cruiser went off the road and hit several trees, killing the veteran officer near Lake City.

Sgt. Andy Brown, 54, a second-generation trooper who began his career in Miami 33 years ago, died instantly just after 10 a.m. Tuesday in a twisted mass of steel along a North Florida highway.

The car that investigators examined in Crystal River is a late-model, dark Dodge Neon, driven by Gregory Hampton Platt, 31, of Naples, according to sheriff's documents. Platt faces charges stemming from another chase in Citrus County on Tuesday afternoon that hit speeds of 100 mph.

The Neon had a partially broken out rear windshield, similar to the description of the car Brown was trying to catch up to Tuesday morning, said FHP Lt. Mike Burroughs. Platt was being held without bond Wednesday.

Brown's 2001 Chevrolet Camaro patrol car rocketed off the east side of two-lane County Road 341 and rotated counter clockwise until it smashed into a stand of trees.

FHP spokesman Ernesto Duarte said troopers will not release information on the Neon until the investigation is complete.

In Lake City, fellow troopers spoke fondly of Brown, a sergeant who not only flew an FHP single-engine Cessna during speed enforcement details but also was one of the troop's most prolific ticket-writing supervisors when he worked the roadways.

On his latest operations report, Brown had by far the greatest number of "citizen assists" of any supervisor in his troop.

"He loved his job because he loved helping people," said Trooper Mike Kagle, a long-time friend. "Anytime Andy was needed, Andy was out there."

Brown's personnel file is full of letters from citizens he helped on the roadside, as well as commendations from superiors and from officers in other agencies he assisted in criminal investigations. His performance evaluations were consistently above average. Brown helped the State of Alabama set up its program to use airplanes to catch speeders, according to one letter.

Brown was the 38th trooper to die in the line of duty since record keeping began in 1941 and the first since 1998.

Funeral services were not complete as of late Wednesday.

Brown is survived by son Tucker, 13, father George A. Brown Jr. and mother Elizabeth Anderson, as well as stepfather Richard Anderson and sister Connie Whalen.

Couple accused of fleeing trooper

Published on Thursday, April 29, 2004, in the Tallahassee Democrat

LAKE CITY - Officials think a Naples couple was in the vehicle that Florida Highway Patrol Sgt. George "Andy" Brown III was trying to stop when he lost control of his patrol car and was killed.

Gregory Hampton Platt, 31, and Kelly Jean Smith, 25, had not been charged as of Wednesday in Columbia County, where Brown died.

But the pair was being held without bond about 60 miles to the south in Citrus County, charged with fleeing police there several hours after Brown's death, authorities said.

Brown, 54, was pursuing a traffic violator on Columbia County Road 341 on Tuesday when his 2001 Chevrolet Camaro spun off the road and struck several trees six miles south of

Lake City, Florida Highway Patrol spokesman Lt. Mike Burroughs said Wednesday. Brown was the first FHP trooper to die in the line of duty since Brad Crooks was shot and killed in Hillsborough County in 1998.

The FHP said speed was a factor in Brown's crash.

Three witnesses gave officers a description of the car driven by Platt, a purple Dodge Neon with the back window missing. Officers spotted the car hours later in Crystal River, Burroughs said.

When deputies stopped the car, Platt tried to run, but he was quickly arrested, said Gail Tierney, spokeswoman with the Citrus sheriff's office.

Citrus County charges against Platt include leaving the scene of an accident, aggravated battery and fleeing and eluding. Smith was faces charges of possession of cocaine and resisting an officer without violence. The public defender's office declined comment.

FHP trooper dies on duty

Published on Wednesday, April 28, 2004, in the Ocala Star-Banner

LAKE CITY - A veteran Florida Highway Patrol trooper died Tuesday, apparently trying to make a traffic stop. Citrus County authorities have arrested a couple after a chase, and are questioning them, along with FHP, in relation to the incident.

Sgt. George A. "Andy" Brown III, 54, of Lake City, who once described his Chevrolet Camaro patrol car as the "best thing they ever gave me," died when he lost control of the vehicle and crashed into trees at about 10:05 a.m. on County Road 341 about 6 miles south of Lake City.

The father of a 13-year-old boy, Brown was a second generation state trooper - the son of retired Trooper George A. Brown Jr. In addition to his patrol duties in the Camaro, Brown who flew a plane for FHP out of the Lake City airport.

Troopers investigating the crash said Brown had turned on his blue lights when he got in behind a small, dark car. In his final radio contact with FHP dispatchers, Brown said he was trying to overtake a vehicle, but had not yet provided a license plate number or other identifying information, officials said.

Witnesses provided a description of the other car.

At about 1:40 p.m. Tuesday, the Citrus County Sheriff's Office learned that the car was heading south on U.S. 19 from Levy County.

Gayle Tierney with the Citrus County Sheriff's Office said an agent with the Department of Agriculture reported he had spotted and was pursuing the suspect vehicle.

A Citrus County deputy joined the chase near the county line, Tierney said.

Officers followed the car, a dark-colored Neon, as it headed south into the Crystal River city limits.

Tierney said the car then turned east on State Road 44 and hit a car in the turning lane at County Road 486. The car in the turning lane was damaged, but no one was injured.

The suspect then reversed his car, hitting a Citrus County deputy's car behind him. The deputy sustained a non-life threatening injury. The driver ran from his car and was stopped by two deputies using electric stun guns.

Tierney said speeds during the chase ranged from 50 to 80 mph and that officers were forced to take evasive action from the driver.

The driver was identified as Greg Platt, 31, of Naples. He and a passenger in the car, Kelly Jean Smith, 25, of Naples, were taken into custody.

Charges in Citrus County could include leaving the scene of an accident and two counts of aggravated battery. There were two deputies in the patrol car, a regular officer and one in training. Another charge will be fleeing and eluding, Tierney said. Platt also had a suspended license, and Smith was in possession of less than 20 grams of marijuana.

Platt has a prior criminal history including burglary, grand theft, robbery and aggravated battery, according to the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, and had been released from a state prison in 1999.

Troopers were questioning the pair at the Citrus County Sheriff's Office, along with Citrus deputies, Tierney said.

FHP trooper killed trying to make traffic stop near Lake City
Published on Tuesday, April 27, 2004, in the Tallahassee Democrat

LAKE CITY, Fla. - A state trooper who rejoined the patrol after a year in retirement was killed Tuesday when he lost control of his car and wrecked while trying to make a traffic stop, the agency said.

Sgt. Andy Brown was pursuing a traffic violator when his 2001 Chevrolet Camaro spun off the road and struck several trees, said Florida Highway Patrol spokesman Lt. Mike Burroughs.

"He truly had the safety of the public at heart," Burroughs said. "He truly believed in enforcing traffic laws."

The FHP said speed was a factor in the crash, but gave few other details about the chase.

Brown, 54, had been a second-generation trooper since July 1970, following in his father's footsteps. Brown doubled as a "Bear in the Air," the nickname given to troopers who also pilot FHP spotter aircraft.

He retired in 1996 after a career that saw assignments in southeast and in northeast Florida, but returned to the force after a year off and was stationed in Lake City.

He was the first FHP trooper to die in the line of duty since Brad Crooks was shot and killed in Hillsborough County in 1998.

"I'm devastated," Columbia County Commissioner George Skinner told the Lake City Reporter. "He was a personal friend of mine. I'm going to sorely miss him. My spirit is sorely wounded."

Brown, who had a 13-year-old son, also was the 38th trooper to die in Florida since the FHP started keeping records in 1941. Seventeen of those were shot, 15 died in auto crashes, five died in plane crashes and one died in an explosion.

Brown's accident occurred about 10:05 a.m. on County Road 341 in Columbia County, six miles south of Lake City. He died at the scene.

"His services were exemplary," Skinner said. "He was a trooper's trooper. He gave 110 percent in whatever he did."

The Florida Department of Law Enforcement was investigating the accident, Knight said. He said the trooper's Camaro had a black box, which was recovered following the accident.

The FHP put out a statewide bulletin looking for a black Dodge Neon with an unknown tag and dark-tinted windows, driven by a white man with multiple tattoos and a white female passenger.

On Tuesday afternoon, authorities in Citrus County stopped a car with two occupants who matched the description. They were being questioned.

"It's a sad day for the FHP," said FHP director Col. Chris Knight.

Local officers remember 'hardworking' trooper
Published on Wednesday, April 28, 2004, in the Daytona Beach News-Journal

DAYTONA BEACH -- A Florida Highway Patrol trooper who died in a crash Tuesday was remembered as a dedicated lawman from back in the days when Volusia County Sheriff Ben Johnson was a road deputy in Deland.

George A. "Andy" Brown III stood tall, was known for his impeccable dress and straight approach, Johnson said.

"Andy was a very hardworking trooper, he kept his cars just showroom clean and himself just the picture perfect trooper. He was a friend to a lot of us here," said Johnson from his office Tuesday, as word of Brown's death spread. "Andy was quite a character, he was tough as nails.

"I don't believe Andy was afraid of anything."

Brown, 56, was killed at 10:05 a.m. Tuesday while trying to stop a car on County Road 341 in Columbia County, six miles south of Lake City, an FHP press release stated. While overtaking the suspect's car, Brown's patrol car ran off the east shoulder and struck some trees in a wooded area. Brown was pronounced dead at the scene, the release said.

The suspect's car was stopped in Citrus County and investigators were questioning a man and a woman late Tuesday night, the FHP said.

Brown's wife died of cancer last year, officials said, and with Brown gone, their 13-year-old son was left an orphan.

Volusia County Fires Services spokesman Walter Nettles said when he was growing up in Deland, Brown was a fixture in town, and an important guiding force in his younger years.

"I've known him since I was a kid," Nettles said. "Growing up, he was that guy you could always pull up to and talk to. I feel bad about his son."

Johnson said when they were young lawmen together, he with the Sheriff's Office and Brown with the FHP, they would hang around together at Jimmy Dixon's service station on South Avenue. They'd argue, talk and help each other when they could.

"It was a period of time when we all had to rely on one another, we all back each other up and meet for coffee.

"He dedicated his life to the Florida Highway Patrol and gave his life," Johnson said. "He was a dedicated trooper, he dedicated his life to the citizens of Florida. It's a shame he lost his life. We all lost a longtime friend."

Johnson said he and all of Brown's friends are concerned for his son. "Here this poor child lost both his mother and father in the last year, it's just not fair.

"It's kind of like losing a piece of your family," Johnson said. "We're all hurt."

Longtime FHP trooper killed in traffic accident

Published on Wednesday, April 28, 2004, in the Daytona Beach News-Journal

A veteran Florida Highway Patrol trooper who spent years working Central Florida roadways was killed Tuesday morning in a traffic accident in Columbia County while attempting to make a traffic stop, the agency reported.

Sgt. George A. "Andy" Brown, 55, was trying to stop a fleeing car when he lost control of his marked FHP Chevrolet Camaro and struck several trees, said FHP Lt. Mike Burroughs.

Word of Brown's death "spread like wildfire" among veteran officers in and around Volusia County who had worked with the second-generation trooper, Volusia County Sheriff Ben Johnson said. Brown's father, retired Trooper George A. Brown Jr., also lives in Volusia County.

"His father was an old-time trooper around here, and we all ran together back then," Johnson said.

Johnson said Brown, who is survived by his 13-year-old son, his parents and one sister, was always the guy fellow officers wanted next to them if they got in a pinch.

"If things were going down you were sure glad to have Andy around," Johnson said. "He didn't back down from anything."

An intensely serious and dedicated "spit-shine officer," Brown was also recalled as a fun-loving father with a wonderful sense of humor.

"He was a dedicated servant to the citizens of the state of Florida," Johnson said. "They sure got their money's worth with Andy."

Brown became a trooper in the summer of 1970 and started his career in South Florida before moving to Central Florida. He left the agency for a few years in the mid-1990s, friends said, later returning and taking up where he left off. Most recently, Burroughs said, Brown was stationed in Lake City.

Brown was killed about 10 a.m. on County Road 341 in Columbia County, six miles south of Lake City. He died at the scene, investigators said.

Tuesday afternoon, authorities in Citrus County stopped the car Brown had tried to pull over earlier in the day. Both the driver and a passenger were taken into custody and were being questioned, investigators said. It was unclear what prompted Brown to try to stop the car or why the driver fled.

Brown is the fourth Florida law-enforcement officer to be killed in the line of duty this year, and the third this month. Brown is the first trooper since 1998 to be killed on duty.